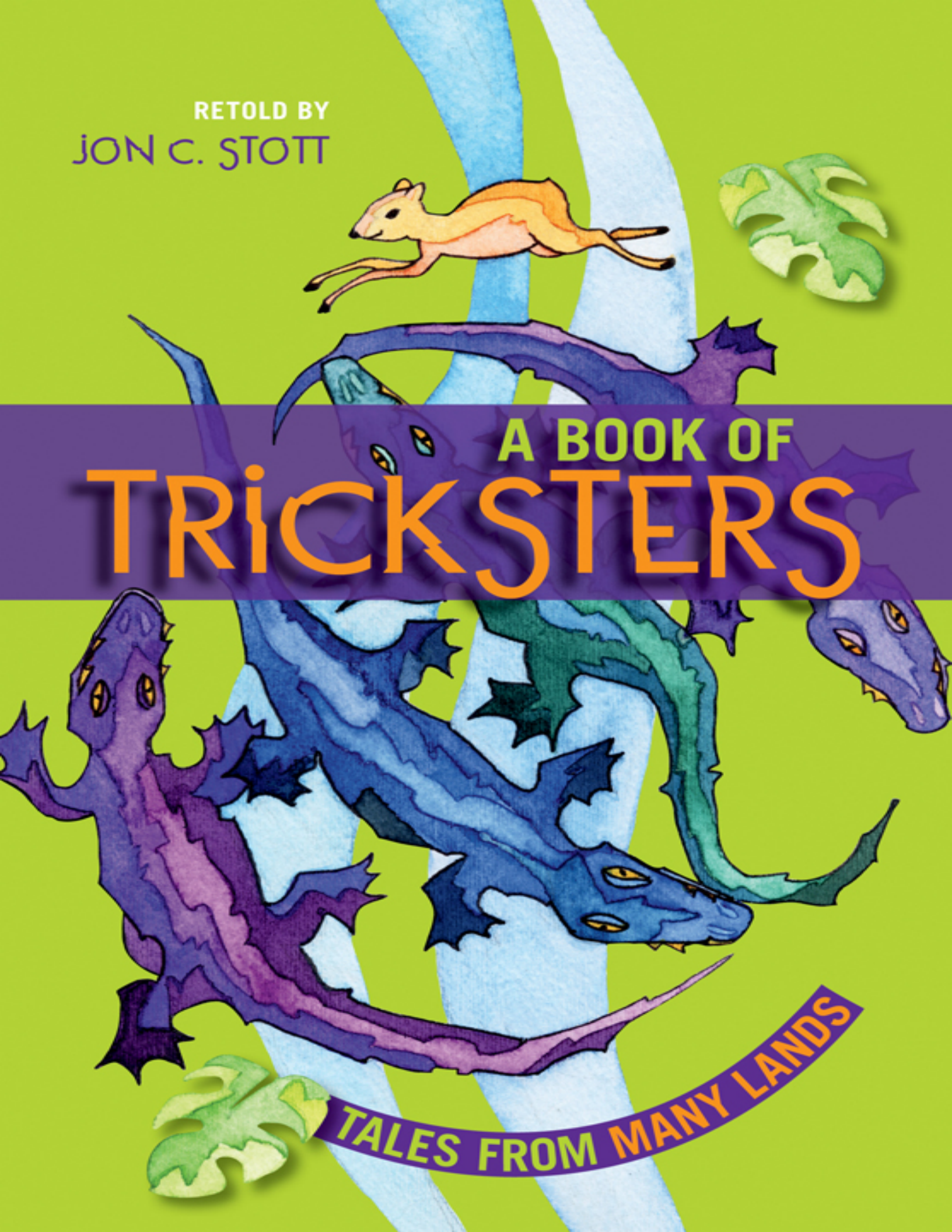
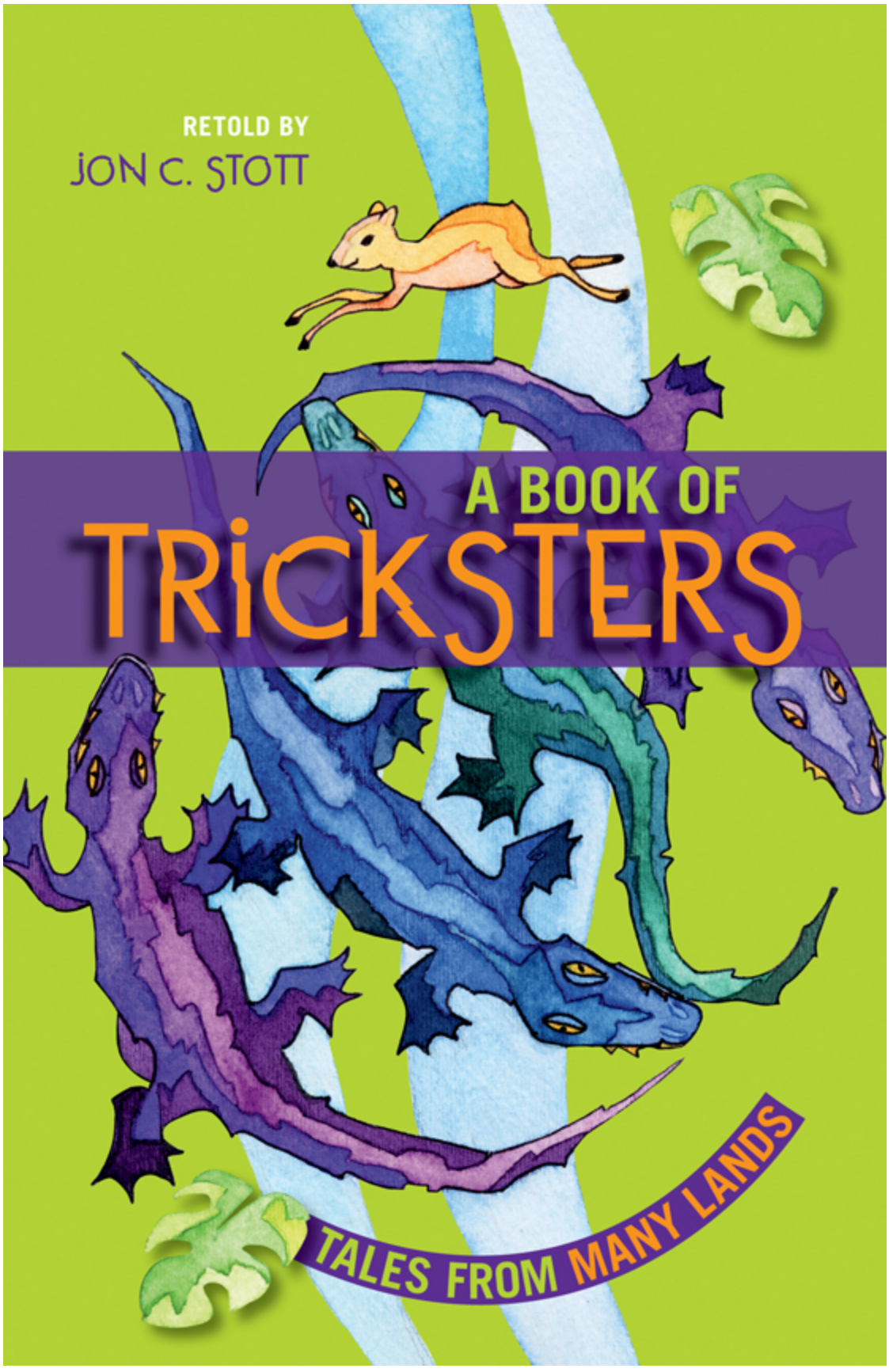
RETOLD BY

JON C. STOTT

A BOOK OF TRICKSTERS



TALES FROM MANY LANDS


RETOLD BY
JON C. STOTT
A BOOK OF
TRICKSTERS
TALES FROM MANY LANDS

A Book of Tricksters

Tales From Many Lands

Retold by **Jon C. Stott**

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

How Anansi Brought Stories to the People: **Ghana**

How Brer Rabbit Got Out of Big Trouble: **United States**

How Nanabozho Lost His Big Feast:**Canada and United States**

How Kancil Built a Crocodile Bridge: **Indonesia**

How the Billy Goats Gruff Got Across the Bridge: **Norway**

Why the Shining One Shines No More: **India**

How the Tortoise Defeated the Willy Wagtail: **Australia**

How Gretel Made Things Get Better: **Germany**

How Fin Defeated Cucullin: **Ireland**

How the Hodja Used His Wisdom: **Turkey**

How Zhao Paid His Taxes: **China**

How Eugene Escaped Poverty: **France**

Why Robin Hood Became a Butcher: **England**

How Maui Discovered the Secret of Fire: **Hawaii**

How Raven Freed the Sun: **Canada and United States**

Glossary

The Trail of the Tales

Acknowledgements

This collection of retellings of traditional trickster stories would not have been possible without the help of many people. I am indebted to all those who have retold the tales over many centuries. I have learned a great deal from two of these retellers—Gerald McDermott and Paul Goble—about ways of approaching stories from cultures different than my own. To Vivian Sinclair of Heritage House, who encouraged me to undertake this project, and to Grenfell Featherstone, who offered wonderful editorial guidance, thank you. Your patience and expertise are greatly appreciated. To Michelle Armstrong and her Grade 6 class at St. Mary School in Edmonton, Alberta, and to Candy Michalski and her Grade 3 class at Holmes School, New Britain, Connecticut, go my appreciation for giving me the opportunities to try out these stories in early versions. The feedback from these teachers and students has been invaluable. And to Clare Stott and Chris Doyle, who read drafts of the stories and offered insightful suggestions, thank you.

:: For Sophie and Gillian ::

Introduction

For centuries, people around the world have been telling stories about tricksters, characters who solve problems by using their wits to fool others. Sometimes, these tricksters want to help people. Other times, they use their cleverness for selfish reasons. Occasionally, they aren't as clever as they think they are and get tricked themselves.

A Book of Tricksters retells stories from 14 different countries. Many of the tricksters in these stories say and do similar things. However, there are differences in the personalities of these characters and in the lessons in the stories. That is because, although people all over the world are alike in many ways, people from one cultural group have different attitudes about life than people in another cultural group.

There's a reason trickster stories have been popular all around the world for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. People who heard or read them found them entertaining. When they thought about them, they often learned more about themselves as members of their group.

I hope that you will find these stories entertaining and that they will help you to better understand people from many different lands.

How ANANSI Brought Stories to the People

GHANA :: **For centuries, the Ashanti people of western Africa have told stories about Anansi. In some of them he looks like a spider, and in others he is an old man. In this story, he helps his people by using his wits to perform difficult and dangerous tasks.**

The people were unhappy. There were no stories anywhere on earth. All the stories belonged to Nyami the Sky God. He kept them all in a box right next to his royal stool. Nyami was a very powerful God and had a very bad temper. The people were afraid to ask him to share his stories with them.

One day, Anansi announced to the people of the village, “I’ll try to get Nyami’s stories.”

Everyone looked at him in amazement.

“You’re so old and so small and so frail,” they said.

But Anansi said nothing and left the village.

He climbed to the sky and walked toward the Sky God. Nyami sat on his royal stool, surrounded by his nobles.

“The people in my village would like me to bring your stories to them,” Anansi said as he bowed politely.

Instead of showing his temper, Nyami laughed loudly. “Yes, Anansi, you can have my stories—all of them, if…” and he paused and grinned, “…if you bring me Onini the crushing python, Osebo the terrifying leopard, Mboro the fierce hornets and Moatia the invisible fairy.”

When Anansi replied that he would bring what Nyami asked for, the Sky God laughed again. “You are so old and so small and so frail, Anansi. Strong, powerful and rich people have failed to bring me these creatures. What makes you think that you will succeed?” Anansi said nothing, but bowed again and left the home of the Sky God.

When he returned to his village, he went straight to his hut. He did not speak to the villagers who crowded around him asking if Nyami had given him the stories. That night, they lingered outside his hut. They wanted to learn what had happened. But when Anansi and his wife whispered to each other, the villagers could not hear what they said.

The next morning, Anansi left from the village quietly. The villagers he passed looked puzzled. They did not know what he was going to do.

He strode down the jungle path, swinging his machete and looking up at the branches of the palm trees that stretched over the trail. Then he stopped, shinnied up the trunk of a tree and chopped one of the branches. He climbed down, trimmed the leaves of the branch he had cut and stood it up on one end. It was more than twice as tall as he was.

He walked over to another tree, shinnied up it and chopped down three string-creepers. He coiled the creepers like ropes over his shoulder, and with his machete in one hand and the long palm branch in the other, he continued along the trail.

“It can’t be true,” Anansi muttered to himself. “I don’t believe it. Surely my wife must be wrong. It’s impossible that Onini could be that long.”

“What are you talking about, Anansi? What are you saying about me?”

The old man looked in the palm branches above him for the owner of the voice. At first, he could only see the thick gray branch. Then he saw Onini the crushing python, stretched out and ready to drop on him, wind his coils around him and crush him for dinner.

“Oh, hello, Onini,” said Anansi casually. “My wife told me that you were the longest creature in the jungle. She said that you’d stretch

out longer than two men lying on the ground. I said that she was foolish."

Onini frowned. "I'm really insulted, Anansi. Of course I'm the longest creature in the jungle, and," he added, "I'm the most magnificent."

"Well, you certainly look very long up there in the tree. Why don't you come down here? I cut this stick to be twice my height. I'll put it on the ground to measure how much longer than it you are."

"Of course," Onini replied, "if it doesn't take too long. I want to get back on the branch and wait for a deer to pass under. I'm getting hungry."

Onini slithered down from the tree and stretched himself out beside the branch. He was horrified; his nose didn't even reach the end of the branch.

"Don't worry," Anansi told him. "I'll help you. I'll tie the tip of your tail to one end of the branch, and then you must stretch as far as you can."

Anansi tied the python's tail with the end of one of the string-creepers he had cut. As Onini stretched out, Anansi wound the creeper around the snake and the branch. "To keep you from slipping backward," he explained. "Pull hard."

"Am I there yet?" Onini called. Anansi said that he'd check. He told the python to close his eyes and work harder. Onini did as he was told. He wanted everyone to know how magnificent he was.

Anansi continued to wrap the string-creeper around Onini, and when the snake stretched his head over the end of the branch the old man quickly tied the end of the creeper around Onini's neck.

"You certainly are as long as you said," Anansi exclaimed. "And I'm sure Nyami will think you are magnificent."

Anansi grabbed the end of the palm branch and dragged the snake back to the village. The villagers gathered around him and stared at Onini the crushing python, who did not look so frightening now that he had been bound head to tail to a palm branch. Anansi said nothing.

The next morning, Anansi left his hut again. This time he carried his machete and the smallest coil of string-creeper. As he walked along the jungle trail, he muttered to himself, just loudly enough for someone who might be listening to hear, “It’s such a wonderful game. I wish I could find someone to play it with me.”

“I’ll play,” came a voice above Anansi. He looked up. Among the flickering shadows and patches of sunlight, he could just see Osebo, the leopard.

“I’m really very good at games,” the leopard continued. And he jumped down from the branch and strode up to Anansi. “What’s your game called? How do you play it?”

“It’s the *Tie-Me-Up* game. First I tie you up. Then I untie you, and you tie me up. Whoever is the fastest at tying the other up is the winner.”

“That sounds like a great game,” said Osebo. And he thought to himself that when he’d tied Anansi up, he wouldn’t untie him. He’d have him for lunch.

The old man cut the string-creeper into three pieces and told the leopard to lie on his back and put his legs up in the air. He tied Osebo’s front paws together, then the back paws. With the third piece of creeper, he tied the front and back paws together. By the time he’d finished, Osebo had counted up to nine.

“That was pretty quick, Anansi,” said Osebo the leopard, “but not as quick as I’ll be. Hurry up and untie me.”

“I don’t think I’d better do that,” the old man replied. “Perhaps when I take you to Nyami, he’ll play the *Tie-Me-Up* game with you.”

Anansi took hold of the creeper that tied Osebo’s paws together and dragged him back to the village. The villagers flocked around Anansi when he returned. Osebo the leopard did not look so dangerous when he was tied up. Anansi said nothing.

When Anansi came out of his hut the third morning, he didn’t have a string-creeper coiled over his shoulder, but he carried his machete in one hand and a hollowed-out gourd in the other. He stopped by a stream to fill the gourd with water. Then he cut a very large leaf from a plantain tree and continued along his way.

On this trip, he didn’t mumble, but he did look around and above him very carefully. There, in the branches of a tree, he saw what he was searching for—a large gray ball hanging from a branch. It was the nest of Mboro the fierce hornets.

Anansi climbed up to the nest. He held the great leaf over his head, opened the gourd, poured some water over the leaf, and then poured the rest over the hornets’ nest.

“It’s a rainstorm! Your nest will be destroyed, and your wings will get all wet!” he called out in a voice filled with alarm.

The hornets flew out and circled around in a panic.

“Quickly! Quickly! You’ll be dry inside.” Anansi directed Mboro, the fierce hornets, to fly into the gourd. In a few seconds, when they were all buzzing excitedly inside, Anansi closed the gourd.

“Let us out,” they demanded angrily. “We didn’t sting you before, but we will now.”

“Maybe you can try stinging Nyami. You’ll be seeing him soon,” Anansi replied.

Anansi returned to the village with a gourd under his arm. The villagers could hear a buzzing sound, but they did not know what

Anansi had trapped inside the gourd. Anansi said nothing.

On the fourth morning, Anansi didn't take his machete, but he did take the longest coil of string-creeper, a basket with a wooden doll in it and two bowls, one filled with yams, the other with sticky latex.

He didn't walk very far from the village this time, and he didn't look up to the trees. After a few minutes, he stopped in front of an odum tree. He put the doll on the ground, tied one end of the vine around its waist, placed the bowl of yams on the ground in front of it and poured the latex over the doll. Anansi held on to the other end of the creeper. He walked off the trail and hid behind the odum tree.

Soon he heard a whirring sound. It was Moatia the invisible fairy, who danced so quickly that she couldn't be seen. Anansi waited behind the tree as the whirring sound came closer to the doll.

A voice came out of the air, speaking to the doll: "I want to eat those yams. I am going to take them." The doll said nothing, but when Anansi gently pulled the creeper, the doll nodded and appeared to agree that the fairy could take the yams.

The yams quickly disappeared, and the bowl sat empty on the ground.

"Thank you," said the voice. The doll didn't reply.

"You shouldn't be rude. You should say something when people talk to you," Moatia snapped.

When the doll didn't answer, Moatia started to feel angry. "If you don't answer me, I'll slap you in the face."

Anansi kept very still and did not pull the creeper. The doll didn't say anything. It didn't even nod. Although Anansi could not see Moatia, he heard a smack and saw the doll's face move suddenly. Moatia the invisible fairy was stuck on the latex. She couldn't move so quickly now. When he peeked around the tree, Anansi could see the outline of her body.

“Let me go right now, or I’ll hit you again.”

Anansi heard another smack. Both of Moatia’s hands stuck to the doll. Anansi could see her more clearly now that the latex had slowed her down. She pulled hard, but she couldn’t get her hands off the doll’s face. She was so furious, she kicked it. But when she tried to pull her leg back, it was stuck. She could hardly move at all, and Anansi could see her clearly. He stepped out from behind the odum tree.

When Moatia saw him, she became frightened and struggled to escape. She pushed her other leg against the doll to free herself. It stuck to the latex. Now she couldn’t move at all.

“I’m very pleased to see you,” Anansi said politely. “I’m sure Nyami will be, too.”

He tied her up, being careful not to get stuck himself. He held on to the end of the creeper as he carried her back to his village.

The villagers gathered around him as he walked toward his hut. They had never seen Moatia the invisible fairy before and did not know who it was that Anansi had tied up to the sticky doll. Anansi said nothing.

The next morning, Nyami the Sky God and his important lords were talking about Anansi when the Sky God caught sight of something in the distance. Someone was walking slowly toward them. Soon, Nyami and his lords could see that it was Anansi, bent over and dragging a very large net behind him.

When Anansi reached the Sky God, he dragged the net in front of Nyami, bowed and said nothing. Everyone was amazed. There inside the net were Onini the crushing python, Osebo the terrifying leopard, Mboro the fierce hornets and Moatia the invisible fairy.

“You’ve done it, Anansi,” Nyami exclaimed. “How? You are so old and so small and so frail.”

“With a machete, some string-creepers, a gourd and a doll,” the old man replied. Then he added, “And with some words and a little silence.”

“The stories are yours. You’ve earned them,” Nyami proclaimed. He gave Anansi the box beside the royal stool. Anansi put the box under his arm, bowed and started home. The important lords cheered as he walked away.

That night, the villagers gathered around and listened quietly as Anansi told them his adventures. Then he opened the box. Words flowed out like hornets from a nest. As they circled in the air, the words joined into sentences, and the sentences joined into stories. Many of the stories stayed in Anansi’s village. Others, caught by the winds, sailed into the sky and landed all over the world.

How BRER RABBIT Got Out of Big Trouble

UNITED STATES :: When West Africans were captured and taken across the Atlantic to work as slaves, they told stories about tricksters who used their cleverness on those who had power over them. Brer Rabbit was a very popular story hero.

One hot summer afternoon, Brer Bear met Brer Fox walking along the dusty road.

"Hello, Brer Fox," Brer Bear said. "It sure is hot today."

"It sure is," Brer Fox replied. "And I'm sure hot under the collar."

"Why's that?"

"You remember when I was digging my new well? I asked Brer Rabbit if he would help and told him that, if he did, he could share the water. He showed up the next morning, worked for a few minutes, then dropped the shovel and started holding his back. Told me that he'd pulled some muscles and couldn't work anymore. He went home. Didn't even bother to pick the shovel up. It took me four days working by myself to get the job done.

"The morning after I'd finished, I found rabbit tracks all around the well. And the water was all muddied up. This happened two days in a row. So I decided to catch him. I snuck up early one morning and nearly grabbed him, but he got away. I could hear him singing about what a beautiful day it was."

"He said he'd help me, too—when I was working the soil so that I could sow collard greens seed," said Brer Bear. "After a half hour of digging, he said he had blisters on his hands. He dropped the rake and took off. He didn't even bother to put the rake away, and I stepped on it. Handle whacked me on the nose.

"I had to finish the job alone, and it took me a long time, too. Then, one morning after the greens came up, I found half a row

eaten right down to the dirt. And there were rabbit tracks in the dirt. I nearly caught him, too. But he got away, singing that same song about a beautiful day. You're hot under the collar, you're so mad. And I'm steaming about what he did to me."

"He sure is lazy," grumbled Brer Fox.

"Greedy too," grumbled Brer Bear.

The two friends stood quietly in the middle of the road, scowls on their faces. Then Brer Fox spoke up: "Maybe we can think of a plan to get him. But it's too hot to think in the middle of the road. Let's go and sit under the shade of that catalpa tree and see what we can come up with."

Just before noon the next day, Brer Rabbit came hopping down the same trail, singing about beautiful days. He looked over at the shade underneath the catalpa tree. He thought he saw something; so, being curious, he hopped closer. Someone was sleeping in the shade, a hat pulled down over his eyes. "Good morning, my friend," Brer Rabbit said politely as he bowed toward the sleeper. "It sure is a wonderful day."

When the sleeper didn't reply, he hopped a little closer and noticed a jug of water. It looked deliciously cool. Beads of moisture ran down the sides.

I sure would like some of that water, he thought to himself. *But it would be rude to wake him up just to ask for a drink*.

So he picked up the bottle, pulled the cork out with his teeth and took a big, big swig…and another…and another. In fact, he emptied the jug.

Then Brer Rabbit noticed a big bowl of stewed collard greens on the other side of the sleeper. His nose twitched. He could smell the bacon fat that the collard leaves had been cooked in. His mouth watered.

I worked pretty hard this morning. I'm sure hungry. Maybe I'll just have a bit of those greens. I'm sure he won't mind. He'd probably be mad if I woke him up.

Now the only thing Brer Rabbit ever worked hard at was thinking about how to get out of working hard. And the lunches he liked best were the ones he didn't have to work at making for himself.

So he pushed both paws into the bowl, grabbed an enormous bunch of the greens, shoved them into his mouth, began chewing… and then spit them out and gave a loud yell.

"My mouth's on fire!" he cried. "Those greens are loaded with hot pepper."

His mouth was burning. He grabbed the water jug and tipped it to his mouth. But, of course, it was empty.

Then he started to get angry. "Somebody's going to get into big trouble for this," he muttered. Then he looked at the sleeping person.

"You, wake up. Why did you put all that pepper in the food? Why didn't you tell me that it was so hot? You're in big trouble."

There was no answer. Brer Rabbit got angrier. His mouth was on fire, and he was really hot under the collar.

"I'm going to teach you a lesson," Brer Rabbit growled. He hopped forward and kicked at the sleeper's leg, but his foot got stuck. The sleeper's hat fell off. The sleeper wasn't a person at all, but a big doll covered with sticky tar.

Brer Rabbit tried to pull his foot away. It wouldn't move. He put his hands on the doll's shoulders and pushed hard. Now his hands were struck.

"Let me go this minute. If you don't, I'm really going to kick you." He was so angry that he didn't stop to think that it was foolish to kick at a doll. When he kicked again, he was really stuck.

Just then, Brer Bear and Brer Fox came out from the bush where they'd been hiding.

"Well," said Brer Fox. "It looks like our plan worked. That rabbit's in big trouble." Then he turned toward Brer Rabbit. "Certainly is a beautiful day, isn't it, Brer Rabbit? I'm glad to see you have a new friend. Won't you introduce us?"

Brer Rabbit tugged and pulled, trying to get free.

"Better stick around," Brer Fox told him. "We've got plans for you."

Then he turned to Brer Bear. "Now that we've finally caught him, we've got to think up the best punishment we can.

"I have an idea," he continued. "He wouldn't help us with the well, but he helped himself to the well water. Maybe we should throw him in the well and let him drown."

When he heard what Brer Fox had said, Brer Rabbit began to sob. "I know my end is near," he blubbered, tears running down his cheeks. "I deserve to be punished for being so greedy and lazy. If I have to go, drowning would be the best way to die. It wouldn't hurt. So why don't you throw me into the well, and we'll get it over with?"

Brer Fox walked over to pick Brer Rabbit up. Then he stopped and started to think. If he wanted to punish Brer Rabbit, he shouldn't do what the rabbit wanted. That would be too easy.

"No," he said. "We've got to think of a better punishment. Do you have any ideas, Brer Bear?"

"He stole my food. So I think we should make food out of him. We could build a fire and roast him. He's kind of scrawny, but he'd be okay as a snack."

Brer Rabbit quickly spoke up. "That would be more painful than being drowned. But justice is justice. Throw me into the fire, and let's get it over with."

The bear paused. He didn't want to use a punishment that Brer Rabbit had agreed to. "No," he said. "We'll think of a better punishment. What do you think would be the worst thing we could do to you, Brer Rabbit?"

"Do whatever terrible thing you have to, but, whatever you do, don't throw me into that big briar patch over there," Brer Rabbit said in a trembling voice. "It will hurt dreadfully. My fur will be torn and bleeding. I might die, and even if I don't, I'd look so terrible that everyone would laugh when I walked by them."

The other two animals smiled. Seeing everyone laugh at Brer Rabbit would be better than killing him. They grabbed him, pulled his hands and feet off the tar doll and began to swing him back and forth. Then they let him go. As he sailed through the air toward the briar patch, they laughed and called out, "It's a great day, Brer Rabbit."

Brer Rabbit landed with a crash in the briar patch. The two friends smiled and shook hands with each other. "I guess we've punished him pretty good," each of them said at the same time.

But from the briar patch came a laughing voice. "You threw me into my old home. This is where I was born. The briars don't hurt me, and nobody can catch me when I'm in here." And then he began to sing about what a great day it was.

"He tricked us," said Brer Bear.

"Yes, he sure did. But I don't think he'll be bothering us too soon," Brer Fox remarked.

Brer Bear and Brer Fox didn't see much of Brer Rabbit after that. But a few weeks later, when the two friends met again along the trail near the catalpa tree, they didn't look very happy.

"This morning, there were footprints all around my well, and the water was all muddied up," growled Brer Fox.

“Last night, a row of collard greens had been eaten right to the ground,” replied Brer Bear.

“And do you know what I heard in the distance?” asked the fox.

“Yes, I do,” replied the bear. “Somebody singing about what a beautiful day it was.”

“I’m really hot under the collar,” grumbled Brer Fox.

“And I’m steaming,” replied Brer Bear.

How NANABOZHO Lost His Big Feast

CANADA and UNITED STATES :: **The Ojibway people living in the areas around Lake Superior often told stories about how Nanabozho used his wits to help others. However, because he was sometimes very greedy, he often played tricks for selfish reasons. These old stories were first written down more than 150 years ago by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, a white trader.**

Even though it was early in May, the month of budding, Nanabozho felt very hot. He'd been walking all morning, and because there were no leaves on the birches and maples, the sun shone right down on him.

I think that the lake is just ahead. I could sure use a good drink of water, he thought.

Soon, he saw the sunlight sparkling off the water, and as he got closer, he saw several flocks of ducks swimming around, more than usual. In the springtime, many flocks of ducks would rest at the lake before heading farther north.

Nanabozho realized that he wasn't just thirsty. He was also extremely hungry. He always liked to eat, and when he could, he'd eat more than he needed. In fact, if he hadn't gotten so much exercise looking for feasts, he probably would have developed an enormous belly.

There were enough mallards, mergansers, buffleheads and coots on the lake for him to have a bigger feast than he'd ever had before.

But there was a problem. How could he catch as many as he wanted? If he used his bow and arrow, he'd probably be able to shoot only two or three before the rest flew off. And two or three certainly wouldn't be enough for Nanabozho. If he tried to swim underwater into the middle of a flock to grab some by the legs, he

wouldn’t be any more successful. And besides, the lake was still too cold to swim in.

So he sat down on a log and thought. After a few minutes he stood up, took the sack that he always carried with him and started putting dead branches in it. Then he started walking back and forth along the bank, near where a large group of mallards was swimming.

One of the mallards looked up and swam to the shore. “What are you carrying in your sack?” he asked.

“Oh,” Nanabozho answered, “I have a very special dance in here. It’s called the shut-eye dance. I would like to perform it in the village, but I will need many dancers to help me.” He paused and then continued, “Perhaps you could help me, little brother. You and all your brothers and sisters could help. I would be very honoured if you would dance with me. It’s going to be a very important dance.”

The mallard was pleased. Mallards were never asked to take part in anything important. They were usually ignored or ridiculed because they didn’t seem very smart. So the mallard swam out to the other mallards, the mergansers, the buffleheads and the coots to tell them about Nanabozho’s invitation.

Soon, there were 50 ducks standing on the sand. More wanted to join the group, but Nanabozho said that for the dance to be well done, there couldn’t be too many. *And*, he thought to himself, *50 would be enough for the biggest feast I’ve ever had*.

His mouth began to water.

“I want you to listen carefully to my instructions,” he told them. “If you don’t do exactly as I say, the dance will be a failure. First, you are to follow me along this trail through the woods until we get to a big clearing. Then, you are to get into four circles. The coots will be

on the inner circle, because they're the smallest, then the buffleheads and mergansers."

To the mallards, he said, "It is very important that all of you be in the outside circle. Do you understand?" Nanabozho loved roasted mallards.

The ducks nodded their heads and quacked excitedly. "Now comes the most important part. If you don't do exactly as I tell you, the dance will be ruined, and I'll have to find another group to join me at the festival. When I start beating on my drum, you must all close your eyes and begin to dance and to sing as loudly as you can. If you open your eyes, I'll punish you. Your eyes will turn red."

"We'll do as you say, Nanabozho," said the birds. Nobody wanted to be left out.

When they reached the clearing, Nanabozho pulled a little drum out of his bag and started to beat it slowly. The ducks closed their eyes, began stepping slowly to the beat and chanting. Gradually, he beat the drum louder and faster. The ducks moved their feet more quickly and began chanting louder and louder. Soon there was such a noise of quacking and chanting that they could hardly hear the drum.

Nanabozho moved closer to the outer circle, the one with the mallards in it. He put his drum down, stepped up to one of them, grabbed it, and wrung its neck. Then he grabbed another and wrung its neck, and another, and another.

He'd gone almost all the way around the circle, when one of the coots in the inside circle opened its eyes. "Help," he screamed. "Nanabozho is killing us. Fly, brothers and sisters, fly."

The ducks began to flap their wings and to run along the ground.

Nanabozho ran after the coot that had shouted the warning and grabbed its feet just as it began to fly. "Your eyes will be red for the

rest of your life," he said angrily. "I'm not going to kill you. I'm going to let you go so you can tell everyone what happens when you disobey Nanabozho. And because you seem to be having trouble getting into the air, I'm going to give you some help." Then he kicked the coot into the air.

And that's why, even to this day, coots have red eyes and waddle as if someone has kicked them in the behind.

Nanabozho looked at the pile of mallards on the ground. There were enough to feed five or six ordinary people. "I guess this will have to do," he sighed as he emptied the sticks out of his sack and built a fire. He began to pluck the feathers of the birds and to clean them. Soon there was a pile of embers at just the right heat for roasting mallards. He carefully arranged the carcasses at the outer edge of the fire and raked the coals around them.

As he sat gazing into the embers and inhaling the delicious aromas of the roasting mallards, he was startled by a voice from the edge of the clearing. "Hello, brother. Do you mind if I sit for a few minutes and rest beside your fire?"

It was Coyote. Nanabozho knew he should invite her to join him and share his meal. But he wasn't very happy about it, because he thought there was barely enough for himself.

When he noticed that Coyote was limping as she came toward the fire, he had an idea. "These ducks won't be cooked for some time," he told her. "While we're waiting, why don't we amuse ourselves with a race around the lake? The exercise will be good for us; it will give us a good appetite."

"But my leg is very sore; I can hardly walk. You'll beat me easily."

"Here's what I'll do," Nanabozho replied. "To make it fair, I'll tie this branch to my leg to slow me down, and I'll give you a head start."

He planned to wait until Coyote was out of sight, untie the branch and then take a shorter path around the lake. He'd get back to the fire first, and then he'd have time to eat most of the ducks before Coyote returned.

Coyote limped off into the woods. But as soon as she was out of sight, she crept slowly back to the edge of the clearing and hid behind a very large white pine. She saw Nanabozho untie the branch and start running as fast as he could.

When he'd disappeared into the trees, Coyote walked back into the clearing, not limping at all, pulled all the ducks out of the fire, let them cool for a few minutes and ate every one of them. Then, she took the leg bones and carefully placed them into the ashes beside the fire. It looked like all of the ducks were still roasting.

Coyote licked her lips, stood up and walked into the woods. She hid behind the white pine and waited for Nanabozho to finish the race.

When Nanabozho ran into the clearing, he was gasping for breath. "I'm really hungry now," he said to himself as he sat down beside the fire. "I'm sure glad that I won't have to share all my feast with that old coyote."

He reached for the first pair of duck legs and pulled them out of the fire. A surprised look spread across his face. There was no meat on the bones. *Maybe they were too close to the heat, and all the meat fell off and burned*, he thought. He reached for another pair of legs, and then another, and then another, without finding any meat. By the time he'd reached the end of the circle of legs, Nanabozho was very angry. If he'd been wearing a shirt, he'd have been hot under the collar.

"You tricked me, Coyote," he yelled. "You are the greediest person I know, and selfish, too. You should have left some of the

food for me. I’m going to get you.”

Just then, Coyote stepped out from behind the tree. “Catch me if you can,” she called out and then laughed. “My leg is all better!”

Nanabozho started after her, but Coyote ran very fast and soon disappeared into the forest.

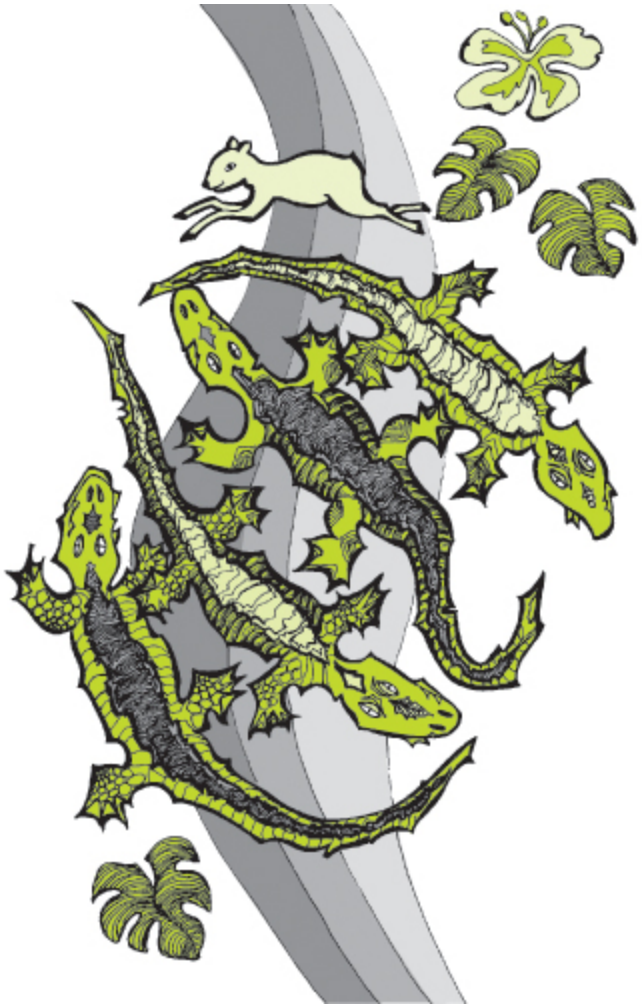
Nanabozho walked to the lake and sat down. He gasped for breath, and his legs ached. He hadn’t had a drink of water all day. He was thirsty, as thirsty as he’d ever been. As he waded into the water, the ducks saw him and, quacking with alarm, flew off over the trees.

Nanabozho filled his stomach with water and started walking.

“I’m afraid that I’m going to starve to death,” he muttered to himself.

His stomach rumbled.

How KANCIL Built a Crocodile Bridge



INDONESIA :: In real life, the mouse deer, or kancil, which weighs just over two kilograms, is in constant danger from large predators. However, the people of Indonesia tell many stories in which it defeats its enemies by tricking them.

Kancil, the mouse deer, woke up before the sun rose. Because he had eaten all of the green grass, buds and cat's eye fruit, he had only been able find dried grass and leaves yesterday. Now he was very thirsty.

He walked along the jungle trail to the river in the darkness. He stepped down the bank, put his front legs into the mud and was about to drink when Buaya, the crocodile, who'd swum very quietly to the shore, grabbed one of his legs in his strong jaws. Kancil realized that he couldn't struggle. He was too small, and the crocodile was too big.

He saw a broken branch lying in the mud. He grabbed it in his mouth, and started waving it over the head of the crocodile.

"Don't you know what a leg looks and feels like?" he said to Buaya. "You've grabbed a stick. Look, here's my leg." And he waved the stick until the crocodile opened his jaws and started to lift his head up. Kancil pulled his leg away, dropped the stick into the crocodile's mouth and hopped into the jungle. He could hear the crocodile spitting out splinters of dry wood and muttering angrily.

"You are really stupid, Buaya. You don't know the difference between a leg and a stick," the mouse deer called out in a mocking voice.

Kancil knew that he wouldn't be able to drink safely at this part of the river, so he walked upstream looking for a less dangerous spot. As he did, he began to sing very loudly:

You're so big, and I'm not.

I'm so smart, and you're not.

A few days later, Kancil woke up feeling very thirsty again. He still only had dried grass and leaves to eat, and there wasn't much left. He waited until it was light before heading to the river. He didn't want the crocodile sneaking up on him.

He stopped when he reached the bank and didn't put his legs into the mud. Instead, he looked over the water. Because of the rising mist, it was difficult to see clearly. But he thought he saw a log floating in the water. Or it could have been Buaya. There were a couple of bumps near the end of the log that could have been his eyes.

I'd better make sure before I take a drink, he thought. He backed away from the bank, sat down and began to plan.

Then he stood up and returned to the bank. "If that's a log," he said very loudly to himself, "it will talk to me. If it's a crocodile, it won't say anything."

A voice came from the middle of a river. "Yes, I'm a log. Can I come closer and talk to you?"

"Buaya, you're even stupider than I thought. Everyone knows that logs don't talk. Of course you can't come nearer. I know what you'd do to me when you opened your mouth." Kancil hopped away and began to sing:

You're so big, and I'm not.

But I'm very smart, and you're definitely not.

The crocodile muttered loudly to himself about what he wanted to do to Kancil. He sounded extremely angry.

The next morning, Kancil came to the river a little later. He knew that he would be able get a drink safely because the mist had burned off, and he could see where Buaya was floating. He knew that if his enemy were in the middle of the river, he would be able to

finish his drink and get back to the jungle by the time the crocodile had reached the bank.

He was about to step off the bank to drink when he noticed that across the water there were enough leaves, green grass and tasty buds to feed him for weeks. Not only that, but a longan tree had clusters of cat's eyes hanging so close to the ground that he could easily reach them. Kancil thought that longan fruit was the most delicious in the world.

He stepped back from the riverbank and sat down to think. He certainly wanted to get all the fruit, but the river was flowing so swiftly that he knew he couldn't swim across, and even if he could, the crocodile would be waiting for him.

Suddenly, an idea came to him. He stood up and walked to the edge of the river. "Hello, Buaya," he called out. "It certainly is a beautiful day."

The crocodile looked up, and when he saw the mouse deer, he swam toward the shore. "You're just in time for lunch, Kancil," he said.

"As a matter of fact, I just came to talk to you about lunch," the mouse deer replied. "But not for today and not me. The king is having a great feast tomorrow, and he sent me to invite you, along with all of your brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles."

Buaya was very pleased. The crocodiles had never been invited to a royal feast before. "Thank you, Kancil. We'd be delighted to come. But let's talk about today's lunch." The mouse deer backed up as the crocodile put his short front legs on the edge of the bank.

"Not so fast, my friend," Kancil replied. "The king also told me that he wanted to know exactly how many crocodiles were in the river. He wants to have enough food for everyone. You've got to

gather everyone here so that I can count them all and report back to the king."

In a few minutes, the river was filled with crocodiles. Some of them were thrashing their tails in the water. Some were rolling over and over in excitement, and a few were snapping at each other. Buaya swam over to the edge of the river. "Have you finished counting, Kancil?"

"Finished? I haven't even begun. Everyone is moving around so much that I don't know where to start. Tell them to quiet down. They'll have to line up side by side, with their mouths closed and pointing up the river, and they'll have to be close together, because I'm going to walk across their backs counting each one. If any one of your relatives eats me, I won't be able to finish counting, and the king will be very angry."

There was some more shoving and pushing and snapping as the crocodiles followed Kancil's instructions. But, in a few minutes, they were all in position. They looked like a floating bridge of logs that led all the way to the opposite bank, near where the longan tree was growing.

Kancil stepped onto the back of the first crocodile. "One!" he shouted. Then he stepped onto the second. "Two!" He called out.

He had counted to 47 when he reached the far bank. He hopped to the shore and bounded toward the green grass, buds, leaves and the delicious cat's eye fruit.

"I'll be right back," he called over his shoulder.

The crocodiles waited and waited. Finally, Buaya called out. "Kancil, hurry up. You've got to tell the king how many of us will be at the feast."

Kancil's voice came from the jungle. "What feast? The only feast is the one I'm having right now. There's enough food for me to have

feasts for a long, long time.” And he began to sing:

You sure are big, and I sure am not.

I’m definitely the smartest, and you sure are not.

When the other crocodiles heard Kancil’s mocking song, they became very angry at Buaya. They began thrashing their tails, rolling over in anger and trying to snap at him.

“You must be the stupidest crocodile who ever lived. You’ve made us all look like fools. Don’t come around us anymore.” And they all swam away, leaving Buaya alone in the middle of the river.

“I’ll get Kancil, if I have to wait all day,” he grumbled.

He waited all day, but never saw the mouse deer. He waited several more days without success. But every once in a while, he thought he heard a song coming from where the longan tree grew.

You’re the biggest that there is.

But I’m the smartest that there is.

Have a good feast.

How the BILLY GOATS Gruff Got Across the Bridge

NORWAY :: **In northern European tales, the villains were often trolls, large, frightening creatures who ate their victims. They had a great weakness. They would turn into stone if hit by direct sunlight. This Norwegian story, in which three brothers use their wits to defeat a troll, was first written down over a century and a half ago.**

The grass was definitely greener on the other side, and there was more of it—lots and lots more.

As the three Billy Goats Gruff gazed across the river, they could hear their stomachs rumbling. They'd eaten all the grass on their side. And they were extremely hungry.

But the river flowed very swiftly, and it was very deep. If they tried to swim to the other side, they'd probably be swept away by the current and carried over the falls whose mist and roar was just downstream.

"Maybe there's a bridge upstream," the smallest and youngest of the goats suggested early one morning. The other two scoffed at him, telling him that they'd have heard about it if there were one.

"We'll never know for sure unless we look," the little goat replied. "I'm going to head upstream to check it out."

"You're wasting your energy," his brothers laughed. But he started off anyway.

The little goat trudged along for hours. He was hot and tired and hungrier than ever. He was just about to turn back when he came to a bend in the trail beside the river. *I'll just see what's around the bend before I head home,* he thought to himself.

When he walked around the bend, he saw a bridge across the river. At the far end of the bridge, a huge Norway maple cast a shadow over the last few planks and the ground beyond. Past the shadows, the little goat saw a field filled with green grass.

Trip, trip, trip. The goat's hooves sounded as he started to cross the bridge.

"Who's crossing my bridge?" a voice roared from the darkness under the bridge.

The little goat stopped. He saw a dark shape climbing onto the planks in the shadows. It was a troll.

The goat knew that if he stayed in the sunlight, he would be safe. He knew that trolls turned to stone if the sunlight hit them. *I might be eaten by the troll if I try to cross*, he thought. *But if I don't keep going, I'm going to die of hunger*.

He had an idea.

"You are certainly the biggest, most fearsome, most magnificent troll I've ever seen," he said to the troll. He hadn't seen any trolls before, but he figured a little flattery couldn't hurt.

"I know you want to gobble me up. But I'm small and skinny, and I'd be tough and stringy. You deserve a better meal than I'd make. My brother will be along soon, and he's bigger and fatter. Why don't you wait for him? I'd just ruin your appetite."

The troll spent a while mulling over what the little goat had said.

"Okay," it finally grumbled. "I'll let you go across. But your brother better be as good as you say."

The troll shuffled and grunted as it lowered itself off the bridge, and the little goat crossed the dark section of the bridge, passed through the shadows of the tree and headed to the green field.

Meanwhile, back at the old field, his brothers started to get worried. "I'm sure he didn't find a bridge," the oldest remarked. "I wonder if something has happened to him."

"Maybe he did find a bridge and is getting fat eating green grass," the middle-sized goat replied. "I think I'll head upstream and check things out."

Late in the afternoon, with the sun very low in the sky, the middle brother arrived at the bridge. Long shadows stretched across it, and the troll crouched in the shadows, waiting. It had been waiting for the middle goat for hours, getting hungrier by the minute.

“Who’s crossing my bridge?” rumbled the troll, although it knew perfectly well who it was.

“Well, your brother wasn’t exaggerating. You are bigger and fatter than he is,” observed the troll, as drool streamed from its mouth.

“Where is my brother?” the middle goat asked. “Have you eaten him?”

“No, I let him cross. I didn’t want to eat him and ruin my appetite.”

The middle goat quickly understood how his brother had escaped the troll and decided to try the same thing.

“You’re right, I am bigger and fatter. And I can tell by the way your stomach is rumbling that you’re really hungry. But I wouldn’t even half fill you up. Why don’t you let me go across? Then you can wait for our biggest brother. He’s so big that he’ll fill you up so that you won’t want to eat for a week.”

The troll spent a while mulling over what the middle goat had said.

“Okay. You can cross,” it said. “But your brother better be as big as you say he is.”

The middle brother crossed the bridge, and, just as the sun set, he joined his little brother in the green field.

Back at the old field, the biggest goat had gone to sleep very hungry. Just before dawn, his stomach was growling so much that it woke him up.

He thought to himself that if his brothers hadn't come home, they might just have found a way across the river. He decided that he'd better check it out before he was so weak with hunger that he couldn't walk.

He arrived at the bridge just at noon. The sun was shining down on the bridge, and the troll crouched in a small patch of shade under the tree. It had been waiting since the second goat had crossed the night before and was very hungry.

"Who's crossing my bridge?" it growled, although it could clearly see the goat in the bright sunlight at the far edge of the bridge. The troll was a creature of habit and always said the same thing when anyone crossed its bridge.

"Your brother was right. You really are big, and you do look like you'd make a great meal."

The biggest goat could tell from the sound of the voice in the shadows that the troll really was big, and, in his weakened condition, he knew that he'd have a tough time defeating it if he had to fight.

"You're right," he called across the bridge. "I would be good to eat, and I can tell from all that rumbling that you're really hungry. But if you want me, you'll have to meet me. We'll have a fair fight in the middle of the bridge."

The troll stayed under the tree. It knew what would happen if it stepped into the bright noonday sun.

"Are you a coward?" the goat taunted.

The troll did not reply.

The biggest goat could see no movement in the shadows.

"I guess you are," the goat continued. "You're a hungry coward."

Still no reply.

"And you're ugly. An ugly, hungry coward."

The troll stirred in the shade and uttered an angry growl. But it stayed put.

“A hungry, ugly coward. And moreover, you’re stupid. Even my little brothers could fool you, and they’re not very smart at all.”

Of course, that wasn’t true, but the troll didn’t know it. It stood up and roared angrily.

“That’s not true. I may be hungry, but I’m not a coward. And I’m not ugly. And I’m certainly not stupid. You think I won’t fight you. But I will.”

The troll rushed out from the shadows.

And as the biggest goat watched from the sunlight in the middle of the bridge, the troll turned into stone—a huge, grey-black boulder that was so heavy it cracked the planks of the bridge. The biggest goat walked toward the boulder, lowered his head and pushed the boulder over the edge and into the river.

The biggest goat crossed the bridge and joined his brothers in the green field. They stayed there for many weeks. By the time they had eaten all the grass, the grass on the other side of the river was green again. And so they decided to go back.

They stayed together until they reached the bridge. Then they all agreed to let the smallest goat cross first, just in case another troll had taken up residence in the shadows below. They knew that their little brother would use his wits, and that working together, they would all arrive safely at the other side.

Why the SHINING One Shines No More

INDIA :: **For many centuries, children in India heard stories from the Panchatantra, a book written more than 2,000 years ago. Many of the stories are about animals who often behave like human beings. In this one, a powerful and proud lion meets a small, weak and wise hare.**

He called himself Bhasuraka, the Shining One. That wasn't his real name, but it made him feel important, and he liked to feel important. In fact, he felt so important that he declared himself the King of the Jungle.

There was no doubt that he was very big and very strong and very fierce. The smaller and weaker creatures were all terrified of him. He would roar loudly as he strode through the jungle looking for animals to kill and eat. He usually ate more than he ever needed. And when he was full, he'd kill some more animals just for the joy of seeing the fear in their eyes.

Every day there were fewer and fewer small animals. One day, those who were left called a meeting under the great banyan tree. Sambar and chital deer, long-tailed gorals and pygmy hogs, hares, squirrels and shrews gathered to discuss what they could do about Bhasuraka.

"Soon there will be none of us left," several of them lamented. "We've got to do something. But what?"

There was much discussion, a great deal of disagreement and a lot of just talking for the sake of talking. Some of the animals wanted to move far away, but were reminded that there'd be hungry lions wherever they went. One suggested an elaborate plan to trap the lion. It involved ropes, ladders, nets and an animal to sit in the middle of the trap as bait. But no one could figure out how to rig such a trap.

Then, a wise old hispid hare made a suggestion. “As long as Bhasuraka is around, he’s going to keep killing us. The best we can do is try to convince him not to kill so many of us. Here’s my idea.” And he outlined his plan.

Of course, there was more discussion—agreements and disagreements, and talking for the sake of talking. Finally, they all agreed that a group of them should go to Bhasuraka and tell him the hare’s idea.

“We must remember not to show how frightened we are, and we must be sure to treat him with great respect. If we don’t do that, he’s likely to become so angry that he’ll kill us all before we tell him our idea,” said the wise old hare.

And so they did, bowing politely as they entered the clearing where the King of the Jungle lay sunning himself. “Oh Shining One,” the wise old hare began, “we understand that you must eat, and that means some of us must die. But you are killing so many that soon there’ll be no one left for you to feed on.”

He went on to explain that each day at noon, the small animals would select one of their own to be taken to Bhasuraka’s lair. “You will always have a supply of food. You won’t have to use so much energy hunting through the jungle. And when it’s cold and rainy, your meal will be delivered right to your door.”

Bhasuraka pretended to be thinking, something he didn’t do very often. He was actually just taking his time, enjoying watching the animals fidget nervously. Finally, he roared: “All right! But make sure I get my meal every day at noon. If you’re even just a little late, I’ll go into the jungle and kill everyone. Remember, I am king, and my word is law.”

“Yes, certainly, oh Shining One!” the group stammered nervously.

That's the way things went for several months. Every day, a different group of animals would arrive in the clearing exactly when the sun was directly overhead, bow humbly, praise Bhasuraka, present him with the animal that was to be his meal, bow again and back quickly away.

Then came the day that the hares, the most timid creatures in the jungle, were to supply Bhasuraka's meal. Each looked nervously at the others, hoping that someone else would volunteer. Nobody did. Finally, the wise old hare spoke up. "I don't want to be eaten any more than the rest of you. I'd hoped to spend my old age watching my grandchildren play. But I'll go. I've had a long life for a hare."

Even though they were all wearing very sad faces, the other hares were all relieved when they heard his decision. "We'll all walk with you."

"No," he replied. "I'll go alone; in fact, I'll leave right now. It will give me more time to enjoy my last morning on earth."

"All right," they said, "but make sure you get there on time, and be polite. We don't want him coming after the rest of us."

The old rabbit didn't hurry—who would? As he hopped slowly along, he thought, *There must be a way that I can stay alive and also keep the lion from being so angry that he'll kill all my family.*

The old hare thought out several plans, but they were all either impossible or impractical. Just as he'd run out of ideas, he passed an old, ruined well. When he looked cautiously over the crumbling bricks that surrounded it, he saw his reflection in the water far below him.

"Aha!" he exclaimed. And then he began to hop more quickly to his meeting with Bhasuraka.

He was late when he bounded into the sunny clearing. The lion was pacing and roaring very loudly and very angrily. "You are late.

I’m going to eat you and then go after your relatives. That will teach the animals that they’d better not disobey the King of the Jungle.”

The old hare bowed and spoke meekly: “Oh Shining One, do not kill all the rabbits. It isn’t their fault. In fact, four of them were bringing me to you when another lion sprang from the grasses and ate them.”

Bhasuraka stopped roaring. “Another lion? In my kingdom?”

“Oh yes, mighty one. Just as he was about to eat me, I told him that he had to let me go, for I was going to the home of the great Shining One. I told him that you were King of the Jungle. He was very rude. He said that he was King of the Jungle and that you were an imposter. He said that he’d heard that you were stupid, a real fool. Then he said that you were a coward and that, if he ever saw you, he’d beat you up and drive you out of this land. He only let me go when I promised to tell you what he said. That’s why I was late getting here.”

Bhasuraka began roaring again. He was steaming. He paused long enough to growl at the old rabbit, “Take me to him, right away. I’ll teach him who the King of the Jungle is.”

“Certainly, oh Shining One,” the hare said, bowing low to the ground. “Follow me.” He turned and hopped off into the jungle. The lion crashed behind him through the undergrowth. Soon they came to the clearing with the old well in it.

“We must go quietly. I think he is sleeping in his lair,” the hare said softly, pointing to the well. The lion edged forward through the grass. His tail twitched as though he were stalking a deer—something he hadn’t had to do lately. He came to the broken wall of bricks and peered over the edge.

Far below him, another lion looked back. *He’s as big and as handsome as I am,* thought Bhasuraka. *I must kill him. If the other*

creatures see him, they might make him King of the Jungle and bring their daily dinners to him and not to me. I'd be disgraced, and I'd have to start hunting again.

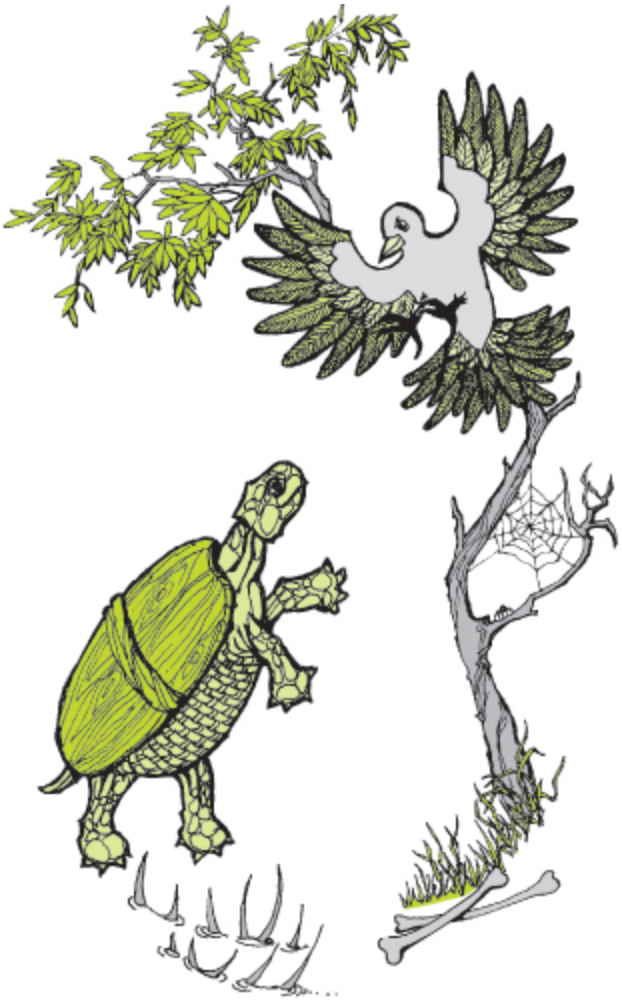
Bhasuraka lifted his head and roared loudly, challenging the lion at the bottom of the well to come and fight him. The other lion roared back just as loudly, perhaps even more loudly. But it didn't move from the bottom of the well.

"So you're a coward, are you?" roared the Shining One. "Then I'll come into your lair and give you a thrashing you'll never forget." And with a mighty roar, Bhasuraka leapt down into the well.

There were no more roars, just a very big splash, and then the sounds of a few broken bricks falling from the walls. The old hare looked down the well. He couldn't see two lions, not even one. All he could see was his reflection.

He began to hop slowly toward home. *This has been quite a day,* he thought to himself. He was looking forward to watching his grandchildren play.

How the TORTOISE Defeated the Willy Wagtail



AUSTRALIA :: Many of the stories of the Aboriginal people of Australia explain how various animals acquired their distinctive phys-ical characteristics. In this tale, the animals and birds learn that physical strength and ability are not the only things that make an individual a hero.

The stream was barely a trickle. Along its bank, the grasses had withered, and beyond them, the leaves of the eucalyptus and quandong trees had turned brown. Food was scarce, and, if the rains didn't come soon, all of the birds and animals would be in danger of dying.

They gathered to discuss the problem and to search for solutions. But every idea that someone suggested was rejected. After several hours of discussion, argument and disagreement, they all sat silently, discouraged and despairing.

Then the tortoise spoke up: "I have an idea."

Some of the group snickered, others groaned. They all thought that the tortoise was too old to have any good ideas. All he seemed to do was sleep in the sun. And even when he was awake, his eyelids were half closed, as if he were about to fall asleep.

"We must send somebody to look for a place where there's enough food and water for all of us," he told the group. "And we must do it soon, before we're all so weak that we can't travel anywhere."

The others nodded their heads in agreement and began talking about who should go to look for a better place.

"Listen," the tortoise said. "I suggest we ask the eagle-hawk to go. He's the biggest and strongest of the birds, and he has better eyesight than anyone else."

The eagle-hawk puffed out his chest when he heard the tortoise's words. He was very proud of his abilities, and thought that if he were successful he'd be made king of the birds and maybe the animals, too.

So he agreed to search, flapped his mighty wings, and rose from the ground. "This shouldn't take too long. I'll see you before noon. Make sure you're ready to travel when I get back."

He flew over many mountains and through many valleys and saw only dry stream beds, withered grasses and brown-leafed trees. Finally, far in the distance, he spotted a patch of green. As he flew closer, he saw a valley with green trees, green grasses and a swiftly flowing stream.

He had just landed by the water when he heard a noise behind him. There stood a willy wagtail, a bird not even as big as his head. "What are you doing here in my land?" it asked in a small but harsh and angry voice. The wagtail waved its long tail feathers sideways, back and forth.

When the eagle-hawk told him about the plight of his friends and asked if he could bring them to this green valley, the little bird agreed. "Why don't you look around the valley for places to live and then come back and wrestle with me?" said the wagtail. "I love to wrestle, but there's no one for me to wrestle with." The eagle-hawk agreed. Such a little bird—he'd flip him over a couple of times and then head back home.

Now if the eagle-hawk had spent more time in his life watching and listening instead of thinking about how wonderful he was, he'd have been wary of the wagtail. He'd have known that when a wagtail comes up to you, it usually means that bad news will follow. When the eagle-hawk was out of sight looking over the grasses and trees, the wagtail quickly dragged some sharp-pointed bones from under a

bush and pushed them into the ground with the spiked ends up. He'd just finished when the eagle-hawk returned.

"Okay," the bigger bird said, "let's wrestle. Then I have to fly back to my friends."

As he strutted proudly toward the wagtail, the little bird moved his tail back and forth. Then he fluttered into the air, darted quickly behind the eagle-hawk and drove his sharp beak into its back. Surprised, the large bird turned suddenly, tripped and fell onto sharp bones. He was stuck, and, try as he might, he couldn't get free. The wagtail let the eagle-hawk struggle until he lay exhausted. Then the little bird pecked him to death.

Far away, beside the nearly dry stream, the other animals and birds waited for the eagle-hawk until the sun dropped behind the horizon. "Perhaps he had to fly farther than he expected," the tortoise suggested. "He's probably resting, and he'll be home tomorrow."

Of course, that didn't happen. And the animals clamoured to send someone else. But who?

"I'll go," volunteered the kite-hawk, the second-largest bird in the group. He wanted to be heroic and respected; but as long as the eagle-hawk was around, no one noticed him. The other animals and birds agreed, and he took off. "I'll probably have to fly farther than the eagle-hawk," he called out. "But I'll definitely be back in two days."

He wasn't. He discovered the green valley, and, like the eagle-hawk, he agreed to wrestle with the willy wagtail. And he, too, lost and was killed.

When he didn't return, the group met to choose another searcher. The magpie volunteered. "I'm not as big or strong. I'm not as fast a flyer, and I can't see as well as the other two. But I

certainly am smarter. Something must have happened to them, but nothing will happen to me."

The magpie left, telling them to expect him home in three days. When he arrived at the green valley, the wagtail challenged him to wrestle. The magpie figured that his cleverness would lead him to a quick victory.

It didn't.

The other animals and birds waited for four days. Then the tortoise spoke up: "If the birds ran into trouble, perhaps we should send one of the four-legged people to search."

The dingo announced that he was the biggest, fiercest and fastest runner of the animals and that he should go. They all agreed. He walked proudly away from the group, his head high. He was certain that the animals and birds would make him their king when he returned.

But when the dingo hadn't returned in six days, nobody seemed very anxious to be the next volunteer. Finally the wombat, short and dumpy, said that he would go. The others were surprised, but they did admire how unselfish and brave he was. "I don't know how long it will take me," he told them as he set out.

They waited until as many days had passed as had passed in waiting for all the other animals together. When the wombat didn't come back, the tortoise spoke up. "It was my idea to search for a better place, so I am responsible for the disappearance of the others. I will be the next one to try."

Nobody said anything. Nobody tried to discourage him as he slowly left the group, his short legs pulling his body through the dust.

Many, many, many days later, the tortoise arrived at the green valley. His belly was sore and his back was scratched because, in those days, tortoises didn't have shells to protect their bodies. As he

moved slowly into the clearing where the other five had been killed by the wagtail, he noticed a large pile of bones pushed under a bush, and a little farther along, sharp-pointed bones sticking up from the ground.

Suddenly, he heard a shrill voice: “What are you doing in my land?”

The tortoise looked up and saw the willy wagtail, fanning his tail from side to side. He’d never seen a wagtail before, but he’d heard that they always brought bad news. Then he remembered the pile of bones and the spikes. He knew what had happened to the eagle-hawk, the kite-hawk, the magpie, the dingo and the wombat.

“I am looking for a place for my friends to live. We have no food and water where we are. If I may, I would like to bring them to this green valley, ” he said politely.

“Of course,” the bird said.

When the wagtail challenged the tortoise to a wrestling match, he thought to himself, *This one’s so old and slow, it’s hardly worth the effort of killing him.*

The tortoise agreed, but told the wagtail that he would need to get some food and water before he could wrestle. “Go ahead,” replied the bird, and the tortoise slowly left the clearing.

But he wasn’t looking for food. He moved as quickly as he could until he found a fallen tree. He split a piece off the trunk, hollowed out the inside and cut a half circle at one end. He’d made a coolamon, like the baskets that people used to carry food and water. But he didn’t gather food and water; he put it over his back and strapped it to him. Then he tore some strips from the tough bark from the tree and wove them into a square mat, which he used to cover his tender undersides.

The wagtail was pretty impatient when the tortoise walked slowly back into the clearing, so impatient, in fact, that he didn't notice the coolamon or the bark mat.

"Let's get going," he said and darted toward the tortoise, backing him toward the spikes. Then he pushed his beak under the tortoise and flipped him on his back. The wagtail said, "That was even quicker than I thought it would be."

He was just about to start pecking at his victim when the old animal started to rock on his back until his body flipped over, and he landed on his feet. He was unharmed; the coolamon had protected him from the bone spikes.

The bird flipped him on his back again, and the tortoise rocked himself onto his feet. This happened again and again, until the willy wagtail became very tired and very angry. He became so impatient that one time, after he'd flipped the tortoise, he jumped on his stomach, intending to pierce it with his sharp beak and end the wrestling match.

He pecked again and again, only to have his head jarred as his beak hit the tough bark of the mat that protected the tortoise's underside. The wagtail's head ached; his neck was sore. Finally, he fell exhausted on the tortoise's stomach.

The tortoise began rocking back and forth, back and forth, until he rolled onto his stomach, with the wagtail underneath him. He pulled himself off the motionless bird and then butted it with his head until it was dead. Then he took off his coolamon and mat, turned and began the long journey back to his friends.

When the birds and animals arrived at the green valley many days later, the tortoise was the last of the group. As they entered the clearing where he'd defeated the willy wagtail, they all cheered for him. One of them stepped forward and spoke. "We all thought

we were better than we are. The eagle-hawk and kite-hawk wanted to be king, so did the dingo. But you are the king. And a king should have something special to wear."

Two of the bigger birds flew forward carrying the bark mat and placed it in front of him. Then two of the animals brought the coolamon. The others helped the tortoise strap them on.

"We want you and your descendents always to wear these garments. Everyone will be reminded of what you did for all of us."

To this day, the tortoise still wears the coolamon on his back and the bark breastplate on his underside.

How GRETEL Made Things Get Better

GERMANY :: In 1812, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published a book of German folktales they had collected from relatives and friends. One of the most popular of these tells about how a brother and sister save themselves from two powerful and evil women.

Things couldn't possibly get worse—at least, that's what Hansel and Gretel thought.

The previous autumn, their mother had died. Then, before the end of winter, their father had remarried.

"The children need a mother," he'd told his friends.

At first, their stepmother seemed friendly. But soon, they realized that she wished they weren't there.

Then a drought struck the land, and most of the crops failed.

But things did get worse. One night, after they had finished a small and very watery bowl of soup for supper, the stepmother sent them to their beds in the attic as usual. But as they lay there, they heard her speaking to their father in the bedroom below.

"We'll just have to get rid of them. There's only enough food for the two of us. Better that two should die of starvation instead of four. Tomorrow we will take them into the woods and lose them."

Their father, who was frightened of his new wife, protested weakly; but she insisted, and he gave in.

"What shall we do? What shall we do?" Gretel whispered to her brother.

"Don't worry," Hansel replied in a soothing voice. "As soon as I hear them snoring, I'll creep downstairs, go outside and gather some pebbles. Tomorrow, I'll drop them beside the path, and when the moon comes up, we'll follow them out of the forest and back home."

The next morning, as the stepmother and her husband led the children away from the cottage, Hansel kept turning back to look at his home.

“What are you doing? Stop dawdling, you bad boy!” snapped the stepmother. Hansel said that he was waving at his cat, who was sitting on the roof. Really, he was turning his back so that she wouldn’t see him drop the pebbles.

When the family arrived at a clearing in the woods, the stepmother told Hansel and Gretel, “You must stay here. We will come back later in the afternoon.”

She had a smile on her face; their father didn’t.

The hours passed, daylight disappeared, and a cold wind blew through the trees. When the moon came up, it shone so brightly that the children had little difficulty following the trail of pebbles. As the sun rose, Hansel exclaimed, “Gretel! I think I see our apple tree ahead!”

Their father, who was chopping wood, looked up when he heard Hansel. He dropped his axe, rushed to them and gathered them into his arms.

The stepmother wasn’t smiling. “You naughty children! Why did you wander away from the clearing? We looked everywhere, but we couldn’t find you.”

Hansel and Gretel said nothing.

For a while, things seemed to be getting a little better. Their father had been able to buy a sack of flour and had shot some wild pheasants. But a few weeks later, the food started to run low. One night, after the children had gone to bed hungry, they heard their stepmother whisper to their father, “We must get rid of the children tomorrow.”

Gretel asked Hansel anxiously what they would do, and again Hansel told her not to worry. He'd get more pebbles. But when he crept down the stairs that night, the door was locked. He didn't tell Gretel the bad news.

The next day, just as they left their house, the stepmother gave the children half a slice each of very dry, stale bread. Hansel kept looking back at the house as he had before, and when the woman scolded him, he told her he was looking at the birds on the roof. She didn't notice as he dropped bread crumbs onto the trail.

This time, their father and stepmother left them in a clearing that was very deep in the forest. Gretel didn't worry—things certainly weren't as bad as they seemed. Hansel had told her about the bread crumbs. He said that they'd be home the next morning. They shared Gretel's stale bread.

The moon rose, but when the children walked to the edge of the clearing to look for the bread crumbs, they realized that things were much worse than they had ever been before. The little forest birds had eaten all the crumbs.

It was a very cold autumn night.

"Maybe we can make a nest of the pine needles," Gretel told her brother. "It will keep us a little warmer. When it gets light, we may find some of the bread crumbs."

The next morning there was a glaze of frost on the ground. The children could see their breath as they crawled out of their nest of needles. They walked deep into the forest looking for crumbs. There were none.

Gretel didn't cry. "We've got to start walking. At least that will keep us warm. Maybe we can find a trail out of the forest," she said.

She grabbed Hansel by the hand and began to walk.

They walked deeper and deeper into the forest. The frost had made all the maple and ash leaves fall. The bare branches looked like bony fingers clawing at the grey sky.

Every time Hansel wanted to sit down, Gretel scolded him. “We have to keep going! It’s the only thing we can do.”

For two days, the children searched in vain for a trail. By the third morning, they were very cold, their stomachs were empty and their hearts were filled with sadness. If they didn’t find food soon, they would both die and be devoured by the wild animals. Hansel tripped over a big root, lay on the ground and, with tears streaming down his cheeks, told his sister that he couldn’t get up.

But Gretel wasn’t listening.

“Hansel, I smell smoke and…,” she sniffed again, “food.”

She pulled Hansel to his feet. Then, as if by magic, they saw a trail. They followed it until it opened into a clearing with a little cottage at the far edge. And from the cottage came the delicious smell of baking bread. They ran to the front door.

Just as Gretel was about to knock, she noticed something strange about the shingles covering the side of the house. They looked like gingerbread. She pulled one of them loose and took a bite.

It *was* gingerbread—spicy and chewy. She handed the shingle to Hansel and pulled off another for herself. As they busily filled their empty stomachs, they didn’t notice someone peering through a window in the little house.

The door opened suddenly. Hansel and Gretel looked up to see a very old woman in a black dress. A black shawl covered her head, and they could not see her face.

“Oh, please, don’t be angry,” Gretel stammered. “We were so hungry. We haven’t eaten anything for three days.”

“My dears,” the old lady replied in a crackly voice, “you are welcome to my gingerbread. I love children. Come inside, and I’ll cook you…” She paused, and then quickly added, “…a delicious meal.”

She put her hand on Gretel’s shoulder and almost pushed the little girl into the house. *She certainly is strong for someone who looks so old and weak,* Gretel thought.

The old lady sat the children at a big wooden table. They drank big mugs of creamy milk and ate steaming bowls of stew with pieces of meat, carrots and potatoes floating in the broth.

“That food should stick to your ribs,” the old lady remarked. “You’re much too skinny. You need some fattening up.”

That evening, she led the children to two little beds like the ones at home, except these had fluffy comforters and soft, downy pillows.

“I feel happier than I’ve felt for a long time,” Hansel said to Gretel. “I know that the old lady will help us get home. Things are going to get better.”

But the next morning, they got worse. The children quickly found out that she wasn’t a kind old lady. As soon as they came into the kitchen, she grabbed Hansel by the wrist. He tugged as hard as he could, but he couldn’t break free. Gretel tried to pull her brother away, but the old lady pushed her hard against the wall with her other hand. Then she dragged Hansel out the door, took him to the woodshed behind the cottage, shoved him inside and fastened the door with a big padlock. She came back into the cottage and put the key on a hook high up on the wall.

Then the old lady dragged Gretel to the sink and ordered her to clean the pots, pans and dishes from the dinner they’d eaten last night.

“When you’ve finished, you can start cooking for that brother of yours. He’s much too thin; he wouldn’t make a decent meal for a bird.”

All of a sudden, Gretel understood. The old lady wanted to eat them! She wasn’t a kindly old lady who fed lost children. She was a witch. Gretel remembered how her mother had warned her not to wander alone in the forest because evil old witches lived there.

That afternoon, when Gretel brought a plate of baked chicken, dumplings and bread to the woodshed for her brother, he was sobbing, “What will we do? What will we do?”

“Don’t worry, Hansel, we’ll think of something,” she replied as she passed the plate through the bars that covered the window. She tried to sound as cheerful as she could, even though she wasn’t sure what she could do.

In the morning, when Gretel went to the woodshed with a bowl of porridge for her brother, she found the chicken bones on the plate that she’d served to Hansel last night. Her brother had picked them very clean.

“Take this,” Gretel whispered, handing a bone through the bars. “I don’t think the witch can see very well, and if she wants to feel your hand to see if you’re getting fatter, hold out the bone. She’ll think it’s your finger, and that you’re still very skinny.”

That’s what happened—for weeks and weeks and weeks. The witch fed Hansel well. He became quite plump, but the witch didn’t know it. She fed Gretel leftover scraps. Things weren’t getting any better—but they weren’t getting any worse.

Then one day, as the ash and maple trees began to wear the green sheen of early spring, things got worse again—the worst they had ever been. The witch lost her patience.

“This is taking far too long,” she muttered to Gretel. “I guess I’ll just have to roast him as he is and then catch some fatter children.”

What the witch didn’t say was that she planned to eat Gretel as well. Two skinny children would be more filling than one.

“Girl, gather wood and take it to that oven near the woodshed. Start a fire, and I’ll be out in a few minutes.” Gretel did as she was told. The witch came and stood by her, cackling happily. “Soon,” she muttered to herself, “soon.”

“Now, girl, I want you to see if the oven is hot enough for baking.” When the little girl opened the door to look in, the witch planned to push her into the oven, close the door and cook her first.

Gretel had an idea that that’s what the witch wanted to do. She stammered, “B-b-but, I don’t know how to do it. How can I get close to see if it’s hot enough?”

“Foolish child,” snapped the witch, who by now was really impatient and very hungry. “Move over! I’ll show you how it’s done.” And she pulled a chunk of wood over to the oven, stepped up on it, opened the door and leaned forward.

Gretel knew she’d have only one chance. She jumped onto the chunk of wood and shoved the witch as hard as she could. The old lady fell forward into the oven, and Gretel grabbed the heavy door and pushed it closed. The witch pushed against the door, but Gretel’s fear and her courage made her strong. She swung a bar across the door and stepped back.

“Hansel! I’m coming,” she cried, joy in her voice. She ran to the cottage for the key and freed her brother. “Let’s get out of here and try to find our way home,” she said as she gasped to catch her breath.

“First,” Hansel replied, “you’ve got to eat. You’re so thin, a breeze would blow you away. You’ll need strength for the long walk ahead of

us."

While Gretel was making griddle cakes, Hansel looked around the house.

"Look!" he shouted out. He dragged a small wooden chest into the kitchen and opened it. It was filled with gold coins.

"I don't think she just grabbed children," said Hansel. "I think she must have invited grown-ups in for dinner, too.

"We should take some of the coins to buy food when we get home," he said.

After they finished eating, they loaded their pockets with coins and with the griddle cakes they hadn't eaten. Then they walked out of the witch's cottage—without washing the dishes.

They walked through the forest for several hours.

"Hansel," Gretel remarked, "I have a feeling that things are really getting better. I think we're close to home. I wonder if maybe we wandered so far into the woods because the witch had some kind of magical power that made children come to her house. Now I feel as if there's something pulling us home."

When they stopped to rest at noon, Hansel thought that the woods looked familiar. "Look!" he exclaimed. "Is that our apple tree over there?"

Both of them jumped up and ran toward the tree. They came into the yard, where their father was chopping wood. He looked very tired and very sad. "Father," they cried out together, "we're home!"

He dropped his axe when he heard the children and, when he saw them, smiled for the first time in many months. There was a tangle of arms, lots of hugs and kisses and many tears—all happy. The children told their father about their adventures and showed him the gold coins. Then they looked nervously at the little house.

“She’s gone,” he said. “She told me that if I couldn’t take care of her, she’d find someone who could. I haven’t seen her in months.”

The three of them held hands and walked into their cottage.

“Things really are better now,” Gretel smiled.

How Fin Defeated Cucullin

IRELAND :: **For centuries, Irish people have told stories about Fin M'Coul, a brave and strong giant. But they also like to recount the tale about a time when he wasn't so brave and needed to be saved by his wife.**

Oonagh struggled to carry two buckets of water up Knockmany Hill. When she reached the door of the house, she put them down, gripped the door handle with both hands and gave a mighty pull. The west wind was blowing so hard that the door wouldn't open. She gave another heave, and at last it opened. She picked up the buckets and went inside.

When they had married, Fin M'Coul had told his wife that he wanted his house on the top of Knockmany Hill, facing west. He said that it was such a lovely sight to see the sun sinking every evening.

Oonagh agreed that the view was wonderful. But there were two big problems. There was no well near the house. Every time she needed water, she had to go to the stream at the bottom of the hill. And because of the strong wind, it took all her strength to pull the door of the house open.

Oonagh had been after Fin for years to fix these problems. He always said he'd be happy to do these things for her. But somehow he never got around to it. He always seemed too busy with some other big project.

Just now, he and his friends were building a giant rock causeway from Ireland to Scotland. And if he wasn't working on some project, he would wander around Ireland fighting other giants. Fin's reputation for strength meant that all the other giants wanted to try their strength against him.

Oonagh went to close the door. She saw someone coming from the bottom of the hill. It was Fin—and that seemed strange to her. It

was the middle of the afternoon. He always liked to work until just before sundown, when he would come home, sit on the bench beside the door, watch the sun set and then come inside to enjoy the enormous meal Oonagh had cooked.

“What a surprise,” she said as Fin came up to the door. “What brings you home so early?”

“The boys have been working very hard on the causeway. I thought they needed a rest. And besides,” he said in a booming, hearty voice as he wrapped his arms around her in a big hug, “I wanted to be home to spend this lovely afternoon with you, my little lamb.”

Oonagh was pleased with his words, but she thought there was something more to it than that. Suddenly, Fin put his thumb in his mouth, closed his eyes and frowned. Then, his knees started to shake. Oonah knew something was wrong. Fin always sucked on his thumb to help him find out if danger was nearby. That’s how he’d been able to get ready for all the giants who’d come to fight with him. But she’d never seen his knees tremble before.

“It’s Cucullin,” he said in a voice that wasn’t so big and hearty. “He’s the only giant I’ve never beaten. One of the boys heard that he was in the neighbourhood and that he was comin’ to thrash me. People say that he’s so tough that once he flattened a thunderbolt so that it looked like a griddle cake. They say he carries it in his pocket. I don’t know what to do. I can feel that he’s really close.”

Now Oonagh understood why Fin never seemed to have had the time to turn the house around. With the door facing west, he could see his enemy coming.

“Why, you’re blubbering like a baby,” she said, surprised to see her man so frightened. She paused and thought for a few seconds. “Listen, you big baby, I have an idea. Quit sucking your thumb. Don’t

ask questions and do exactly as I tell you. Quick! We have no time to waste."

She told Fin to go down the hill to fetch 10 of the roundest and whitest rocks in the stream. While he was doing this, she made 10 round balls of white cheese. They were so fresh that milk and water seeped out of them. Then she kneaded a great pan of dough for griddle cakes.

She'd just set the 10 big round balls of cheese on the kitchen shelf when Fin returned with the stones.

"Put them in the corner, under the shelf," she ordered.

Fin was puzzled, but did as he was told. Then she told him to go to the neighbours to borrow a dozen griddle pans.

"Now," she said, when Fin returned with the pans, "I want you to wrap dough around each of these pans so that you can't see them." She gave him half of the dough. The other half she made into cakes without pans in them. Then she put them all to bake by the fire.

Fin was still puzzled, but he remembered Oonagh's orders not to ask questions.

"Go to the storeroom and bring the cradle out," she said.

The cradle was dusty, for it hadn't been used since Sean, their grown son, had been little. He'd been a pretty big baby, so they'd built a very large cradle.

Fin carried it into the room. Oonah had gathered several baby blankets and had found a very big bonnet with lace around the edges. "Put this on," she said, handing the bonnet to Fin. He opened his mouth in surprise and was just about to ask why when she reminded him, "Just do as you're told, and don't ask questions."

He put the bonnet on and tied the ribbons under his chin.

"Get in the crib," she ordered.

He did as he was told, and she covered him with the blankets. Fin stuck his thumb in his mouth, and again his knees started to tremble. “Cucullin’s at the bottom of the hill,” he almost sobbed.

A few minutes later, three knocks as loud as thunder sounded on the door.

“Come in,” called Oonagh in a very cheery voice.

“Where’s Fin?” Cucullin asked in a voice louder than Fin’s. “I’ve come to give him a real thrashing.”

“Why, he just went out to meet you,” she replied, her voice very sweet. “You must have come by a different path. But sit down and have a cup of tea while you wait.”

After 10 minutes, Cucullin began to get impatient. He gazed around the cottage, thinking Fin might be hiding. But all he saw was a very big baby sleeping in the cradle near the fireplace. He looked toward the door. Surely Fin would be coming home soon.

“While you’re waiting, perhaps you could help me. Fin was going to turn the house around so that the door wouldn’t face the wind. And he was going to dig a well in the yard. But he’s been so busy working on the great causeway to Scotland that he hasn’t had the time. I know how strong you are. You could do it in a few minutes, while you’re waiting.”

Cucullin was certainly strong, and he was flattered that Oonagh had noticed. He rolled up his sleeves and began rubbing the first finger of his right hand. When he saw Oonagh staring at him with a puzzled look on her face, he explained: “That finger is where I store all my strength. I’m just limbering it up.”

He went outside, wrapped his arms around the house, lifted with all his might and turned it so that the door faced east, away from the wind. Then he went to the shed, found a shovel and began to work furiously. In a few minutes, he had dug the well for Oonagh.

When Cucullin came back in, Oonagh was standing by the cradle, handing the baby what looked like a large white rock.

“The little tad was restless. When he wakes up, he likes to play with a rock. He and Fin each take a rock and squeeze it so hard that water comes out. Seeing as how Fin’s not here yet, perhaps you’d like to play. There’s the pile of rocks in the corner.”

Cucullin liked babies. He picked up a rock and squeezed. Nothing happened. He squeezed so hard that his face turned red.

“This is hard. I can’t believe that Fin and the baby play this game.”

In the cradle, Fin said, “Goo,” held up his rock—which was really a ball of cheese—and squeezed it so the water ran out, popped it into his mouth, chewed it and swallowed it in one big gulp.

You can imagine how surprised Cucullin was. And, to tell the truth, he started to feel a little worried. If the baby was so strong that he could squeeze water out of a rock and then eat the rock, how strong would his father be? Maybe coming here to beat Fin up wasn’t such a good idea.

“Sure and you must be hungry after all that hard work,” Oonagh said to Cucullin, smiling politely. “It looks as if Fin isn’t going to get home soon. Won’t you have a couple of griddle cakes? I just made them.”

She put two on a big platter and set them on the table before the giant. Then she took one to the baby.

Cucullin was very hungry. He took one of the cakes, opened his mouth wide and took a very big bite. *CLANG!*

His teeth hit the pan hidden inside. Two of them broke off. He said nothing, but looked over at the baby, who was chewing his cake.

Not wanting to insult Oonagh by telling her that the cake was so hard that he'd broken his teeth, he took another bite. *CLANG!*

Two more teeth broke. The baby kept munching. Now Cucullin became really worried. The baby even had stronger teeth than he did. Maybe he'd better not try to thrash the father.

"Thank you kindly for the food," he said, standing up. "It's getting late. I should be getting home before dark. I'll come to call on Fin another time. But," and he paused to look at the baby, "that's a wonderfully strong young one. It's amazing. Where does he get such strength?"

"Why, it's in the big teeth at the back of his mouth," Oonagh told him.

"My goodness! I'd certainly like to feel those teeth before I go. May I?"

"Certainly. But remember to put your finger way to the back of the mouth." She turned to the cradle and told the baby, "Open your mouth wide. The big giant wants to touch your teeth." The baby did as he was told.

Cucullin knelt down and leaned over the crib. The baby's open mouth looked very big, and so did the teeth in it. Maybe he shouldn't touch them. But he didn't want Oonagh to think that he was afraid of a baby, even if it was the biggest one he'd ever seen.

The tip of his finger just touched the big tooth at the back of the baby's mouth, when—*CRUNCH*—Fin bit down with all of his strength. Cucullin yelled and sat looking at his hand in amazement. The finger that held all his strength was gone. The baby had bitten it off. It was lying on the floor.

The baby stood up, threw down the blankets and tore off the bonnet with the lace around the edges. Cucullin was terrified when

he saw that the baby was his enemy, Fin M'Coul, the giant he'd come to beat up.

Cucullin knew that without his finger, he couldn't fight Fin. But he knew he could still run fast, and he did—out the door, down Knockmany Hill and across the Giant's Causeway. Fin was close behind him.

Fin didn't get home until dawn the next day. He and Oonagh sat by the door watching the sun rise. "It's as beautiful as the sunset," he remarked.

Oonagh didn't say anything when the neighbours came to say how proud they were to see Fin chasing Cucullin out of the neighbourhood. She was happy that her man was safe and that nobody knew how frightened he had been.

She was glad that she wouldn't have to go down to the bottom of Knockmany Hill every time she needed water, and that she wouldn't have to battle the west wind every time she tried to open the door.

How the HODJA Used His Wisdom

TURKEY :: In Turkey, many stories are told about the Hodja, whose name means “man of wisdom and learning.” Although he could be very wise, sometimes he was very foolish. Sometimes he wisely pretended to be foolish.

Once, when the Hodja had been asked to be a *cadi*, a judge for a small court, an angry restaurant owner came into the court dragging a poor beggar. “This man owes me five piastres,” he announced angrily.

The Hodja asked the beggar to tell his side of the story. It seems that the poor man, with only a small piece of bread to eat, had begged the restaurant owner for a bowl of soup. When he was refused, he snuck into the kitchen and held the bread over a steaming pot. “At least, my bread might pick up some of the delicious aroma of the soup,” he said. “But the owner burst into the kitchen and demanded that I pay for holding the bread over the soup. I told him that I hadn’t taken anything and that I had no money.”

The Hodja thought for a moment; then he told one of the attendants to bring five piastres to him. The restaurant owner smiled happily, thinking that he was going to get paid.

“Come closer,” the Hodja instructed the owner. “Now listen,” he said, cupping the five piastres in his hands and jingling them together. “Doesn’t that sound beautiful, the coins jingling together?”

When the merchant agreed, the Hodja announced to the court, “The restaurant owner charged this beggar five piastres for the smell of soup. I am paying him with the sound of money, five piastres’ worth.”

But the Hodja was not always as wise. Once he heard a noise in the middle of the night. He looked out the window and thought he

saw a shadowy figure moving around underneath the walnut tree in the backyard. *It's a robber*, he thought, and rushed to grab his bow and arrow. He leaned out the window and shot three arrows into the shadowy figure. It stopped moving. "I've killed the robber," the Hodja said to himself as he returned to bed and went to sleep.

The next morning he came into the kitchen prepared to tell his wife how brave he'd been, protecting her from the nighttime robber.

"Well, if it isn't my Hodja," she said angrily and held up his robe. It had three large arrow rips in it. "Don't you remember that I washed it yesterday and hung it on a branch of the walnut tree to dry?"

A few days later, when the Hodja was in his backyard, the rich merchant who lived next door was in his backyard, too. He was an arrogant man who never missed an opportunity to make other people feel foolish. And he never went to the mosque to say his prayers.

When he came near the wall that separated his yard from the Hodja's, the rich merchant heard the Hodja praying loudly.

"Heaven grant my prayer," the Hodja said loudly. "I ask only for 100 piastres. That will be all I need to buy food for myself and my wife, get straw for my donkey and purchase a new robe. But it must be 100 piastres; 99 are not enough. I cannot accept less than 100 piastres."

The next few mornings, the merchant heard the Hodja loudly intoning the same prayer.

"Aha," the rich merchant thought to himself. "I will have fun with this foolish Hodja who says he will not accept anything less than 100 piastres from heaven."

And so the next morning when the Hodja went outside to say his prayers, he found a bag near the wall. He picked it up and shook it.

“My goodness,” he exclaimed, sounding very surprised. “It’s money. My prayer has been answered.”

He sat down on the ground, opened the bag and began to count. There were only 99 piastres. “I must have made a mistake in my counting,” he said loudly, sounding exasperated. He counted again, this time very loudly.

“There is no mistake,” he sighed. “There are only 99 piastres. Perhaps heaven, in granting my prayer, has decided to teach me patience. Perhaps, when I have learned patience, I will be granted the last piastre. Then I can buy food, straw and a new robe.”

In the meantime, he took the bag of money into his house and locked it in the cupboard.

On the other side of the wall, the merchant began to worry. As soon as the Hodja had finished counting the money, the merchant had planned to pay a visit. He would explain that he’d played a trick, and then he would call the Hodja a real fool for believing that heaven would send money into the backyard. After that he would demand his money back.

But before he made his visit, the merchant put on his finest, most expensive robe. He wanted to impress the Hodja with his wealth and make him feel ashamed of his old and shabby garments.

When the Hodja opened his door and saw his grand visitor, he bowed low.

“Effendi,” he said in a very meek voice, “I am honored by your visit. Won’t you enter my humble home?”

“No,” came the haughty reply. “I’ll state my business quickly. I’ve played a trick on you. It was I who placed the bag of 99 piastres in your backyard. I wanted to see if you would keep your word to heaven—that you would only accept 100 piastres and no less. How

foolish you were to believe that the money came from heaven. And, you didn't keep your word. You took the money into your house."

The Hodja stood up straight. He didn't look humble anymore. He scowled angrily and then almost growled at the merchant, "Who are you, who never goes to the mosque, to question the power of prayer? I say my prayers five times a day at the mosque and other times at home. Heaven has sent the money in answer to my prayers. I did not spend the money. I am keeping it locked in my cupboard until heaven sends me the last piastre."

The merchant demanded the bag of money. The Hodja said nothing. Then the merchant demanded the cupboard key. Again the Hodja said nothing. Finally, the merchant said, "I now see that the only way that I can get my money back is to go before the cadi. If he says you can keep the money, I will agree. But if he says it's mine, you must return it."

Of course, he thought that no judge would ever believe a story about the Hodja getting a bag of piastres from heaven. The merchant was certain that the money would soon be back in his own house.

"Let's go right now to see the cadi," the merchant snapped impatiently. "I am going to get my horse."

"But Effendi," the Hodja said respectfully, "you would not want to be seen riding on your fine horse with me beside you on my thin, old donkey. Her hair is beginning to fall out, and she's so lame and slow that we couldn't make it to the court before it closes."

"Very well," the rich merchant replied. He went to his stable and came back riding his finest mare and handed the reins of his second-best horse to the Hodja. He ordered, "Get your saddle and let us get going."

“But Effendi,” the Hodja said in a soft, humble voice, “my saddle is so old. The leather is cracked, and it is too small for this wonderful horse. You would feel embarrassed and foolish riding next to me.”

The merchant went back to the stable and returned with his second-best saddle. “Fasten the saddle and mount up. We’ve wasted too much time.” He was certain the cadi would order the Hodja to return the piastres, and he was very anxious to have the bag of money back in his house.

“But Effendi, I cannot sit in that wonderful saddle on that magnificent horse and ride beside you. Look at my robe; it is so tattered.” The Hodja was wearing the robe he’d shot on the night he thought there was a robber in the backyard. “People would point and laugh at you; they would say you were riding to town with a beggar.”

The merchant wanted to get his money back, but he didn’t want to be embarrassed along the way. He went into his house and came out with his second-finest robe over his arm. The Hodja put it on over his torn and shabby one, mounted the second-best horse and said to his neighbour, “I think we’re ready to go to court now.”

Soon the two were standing before the cadi. The merchant made his case quickly. He had wanted to play a joke on the Hodja and had put the money in his neighbour’s backyard. But now he wanted his money back right away.

The cadi was inclined to believe the rich merchant, but because he was fair, he asked the Hodja to tell his story.

“The merchant says it is his,” the Hodja began. “But it is a gift to me from heaven. He wants to own everything. Why, if you ask him, he’ll tell you that the horse I rode up on, the saddle I sat on and the robe I’m wearing are his. He’ll want to take them as well.”

Turning to the merchant, the cadi asked, “Are the horse, the saddle and the robe yours?”

“Of course they are. Do you think that a foolish, poor old man like that could afford such wonderful things? And he thinks that he got my money from heaven. He believes that his prayers were answered.”

The Hodja and the rich merchant sat on a bench for a long time, waiting for the cadi to make his decision. The Hodja had a contented look on his face. The merchant seemed impatient.

Finally, the cadi spoke. “You are very rich, Effendi,” he began. “But just because you own a great deal and, from what I hear, want to own more, you can’t have things just by saying that they are yours. And you are too proud. You think you are better than other people. You like to make them feel foolish. I know that the Hodja is a wise and good man. I know that he prays every day, and I don’t remember having seen you at the mosque. The money, the clothes, the horse and the saddle are his.”

The merchant’s face fell. Not only didn’t he get his money back, he had also lost a good horse, a saddle and a fine robe as well. And even more, he had lost his pride. The cadi had made him feel like a fool. He rode home alone, a defeated man.

That night, the merchant was sitting on a bench outside his front door feeling very unhappy when the Hodja came out of his house carrying a bag of money. He walked up to the merchant and said, “There are 99 piastres in there. Because I did not receive the 100 piastres that I asked for in my prayers, I cannot keep them. They are yours. I’ll bring the horse, saddle and robe back tomorrow when I return from morning prayers.”

The Hodja began to walk back toward his own door. Then he paused, turned to face the merchant and said, “You have your money back. I hope that you have learned a lesson about pride. And I hope that soon I’ll see you at morning prayers.”

How ZHAO Paid His Taxes

CHINA :: **For centuries, people in China have told stories about cruel, greedy masters who were punished for the way they treated poor people. In real life, poor people could not laugh at these masters, but they could laugh at the characters in the stories.**

Master Li woke up feeling very happy. This was his favourite day of the year, the day the tenant farmers who worked on his land had to pay their taxes.

They'd already given him half of their harvest. His barns were full of rice and wheat. It didn't matter to him that the harvest had been poor because of the drought and that his tenants wouldn't have much food for the winter. He had all that he needed—and a great deal more.

A thin, mean smile spread across his lips as he thought of all the money he'd be collecting. Each of the tenant farmers would have to pay 10 taels, money that came from selling their rice and wheat. He was already the richest man around, and by tomorrow he'd be even richer.

Today, he thought, *is the best day of the year*.

He'd just finished breakfast when he heard the sound of hooves echoing off the stones in his courtyard. When he came to his door, he saw Zhao, the poorest of his tenant farmers, leading a mare so thin that all her ribs showed.

"Get that horse out of my courtyard before it makes a mess," Master Li shouted angrily at Zhao.

"But," the young man replied, "you don't understand. I've brought this horse to you to pay my taxes. My crop was so small that I don't have 10 taels."

“That pathetic animal,” the landowner said, “isn’t even worth one tael. But I will take it. But you must also give me the other nine taels you owe me.”

“But you don’t understand, Master Li,” Zhao said. “This is no ordinary mare. If you feed it hay, it will cough up silver.”

“Do you think I’m a fool?”

“No, but you still don’t understand. Let me explain. Two nights ago, I had a dream. A wise old man told me to go into the hills and look for a large pine tree beside a brook. He said that when I got there, I’d find a horse that would spit silver if I fed it straw. As soon as the sun was up yesterday, I took a handful of straw and went into the hills. I found the horse just where he said it would be, fed it some straw, waited for a few minutes and then tickled the back of its tongue. It coughed up a tiny silver ingot. If I’d had more straw, the ingot might have been larger.”

“You’ve got to prove it,” Li told Zhao. So the young man reached for a small bunch of hay in his pack and stepped around to the other side of the skinny mare. As he did so, he reached his hand into his pocket. When he pulled his hand out, it was clenched into a fist.

“Now I’ll feed the horse,” he said, holding the straw out to it. The mare made short work of the food.

“Now we must wait,” Zhao told the landlord.

After several minutes, the landowner became impatient. “Tickle its tongue; let’s see the silver.”

“But we must wait until she has digested the straw,” Zhao replied. Finally, Zhao reached his clenched fist into the horse’s mouth and began tickling its tongue. The horse coughed, and Zhao pulled his fist out and opened his hand. There in his palm was a tiny silver ingot.

Although the landowner was amazed, he tried to hide his surprise. With this horse and all the hay he had in his barns, he could become the richest man in China. “I will take your horse in exchange for the taxes; and, to show you how generous I am, I will also give you five taels.”

Zhao didn’t answer right away; he frowned as though he were thinking very hard. Finally, he said, “No, I think that I will keep the horse. Even though I have only this tiny ingot, with it I can buy more straw. The horse will spit out more ingots. I will be able to buy plenty of food for my family, pay my taxes, and some day I might be as rich as you are, Master Li, maybe even richer.”

The landowner became very upset. He wanted the horse desperately, and he was horrified to think that someone else might become richer than he was. He offered 10 taels for the horse, but Zhao refused. Then 20, and again Zhao refused. Then 30, and 40, all the way up to 100 taels. Finally, the landowner said, “And you will never again have to pay taxes or give me half of your harvest again.”

Zhao didn’t say anything for several minutes. His brow was furrowed in thought. Finally, he said, “If you will give me the 100 taels and write down that I’ll never have to pay taxes or give you part of my crop, you may have the horse.”

Quickly, before Zhao could change his mind, Master Li ordered his servants to bring him paper, ink and a brush. He wrote as Zhao had requested and gave the paper to the young man. Zhao handed him the reins to the mare and turned to leave. As he walked out of the courtyard, he called over his shoulder, “Don’t feed the horse too much at a time, and remember to be patient. You have to wait until she has digested the hay.”

“I won’t forget,” the landowner called out. And he smiled his mean smile as he thought about how he had fooled the young man. Certainly this horse was worth more than 100 taels and all the taxes Zhao would have paid for years to come.

As soon as Zhao had left, Master Li ordered his servants to bring hay to the horse, bales of it. He started to feed it to the animal, which devoured it quickly. It was probably the best meal the mare had ever had. Then the landlord waited impatiently. Probably too quickly, he thrust his hand into the animal’s mouth and scratched the back of its tongue. The horse coughed a couple of times, but nothing else happened.

“It must need more hay,” he told the servants. They brought more bales from the barn and spread them in front of the mare. Again the animal ate, again Master Li waited impatiently, again he scratched the back of the mare’s tongue—and again nothing happened.

“Perhaps I am not scratching hard enough or back far enough in the mouth,” the landowner remarked to his servants. So he put his hand way back in the horse’s mouth and scratched as hard as he could. This time it coughed loudly, and Master Li heard rumblings coming from its throat. He pried the mare’s mouth open wide and looked in—just as she threw up all of the hay she’d eaten.

The servants covered their mouths so that their master would not see them grinning. As he wiped the slimy yellow liquid and the half-digested straw off his face, he roared, “I’ve been tricked. A young peasant has swindled me.”

Master Li realized that if the other landowners ever heard he had been tricked by a peasant, they would all laugh at him. He was very rich and powerful, but he could not stand anyone laughing at him.

“If anyone tells what just happened,” he snarled at his servants, “he will be fired from my service, and I’ll make sure that he’ll never be able to work for anyone else around here.” The servants nodded their heads in agreement. Of course, they didn’t want to lose their jobs. Just seeing their master so angry and embarrassed was enjoyment enough.

When Zhao arrived back at his small village, two of his friends came to meet him. As he told them about his visit with the landowner, he divided the money into three equal piles. Then he gave a pile to each of his friends. “That will pay each of you back for money you gave me to buy the mare and the tiny silver ingot; and there will more than enough left to pay your taxes this year. Now let’s not hear anyone say what a mean, miserly man Master Li is. He’s so generous that he paid our taxes for us.”

How EUGENE Escaped Poverty

FRANCE :: **Over 300 years ago, Charles Perrault, a French man, retold many old folktales, including "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood." He often poked fun at the foolishness of rich and powerful people.**

Eugene sat despondently on the steps of the mill. His father had died several days earlier. Even though the old man had not been kind to him, Eugene had loved him, and now he missed him.

Then, yesterday, his father's will had been read. The oldest son received the mill, and the middle son, a strong donkey. They decided to work together, milling and hauling grain. Eugene got only the cat.

When his two older brothers heard that their father had only left Eugene the cat that lived in the barn, they laughed at him. "Well, at least if you have to sleep in a hovel, the animal will keep the mice down," they said. "Don't even think about staying here. In a week you'll have to be gone."

While Eugene thought about his unhappy lot in life, the cat began to rub against his legs and purr. "What am I going to do, Puss?" he said.

To his surprise, the cat answered him. "Don't be so despondent. I have a plan."

"You…you…," the young man sputtered, "you can talk!"

"Of course I can," the cat replied. "But your brothers were always mean to me, so I decided it would be a good idea to keep quiet. You were the only one who ever treated me kindly. So I'm going to help you."

"But…but—" Eugene started.

The cat cut him off. "If I'm going to help you, you have to learn one thing," he said. "When I tell you something, don't ask questions.

Just do as I say. Now, let's start. I want you to get me a pair of boots, the fanciest you can find."

The young man was about to blurt out another *but*. Just in time, he remembered the cat's instructions. So he went to the village and bought an old pair of boys' boots.

When he arrived home, the cat remarked, "They're the right size, but they look pretty scruffy. You'd better get a sharp needle, some strong thread, black shoe polish and a clean rag to fix them up. Then I'll tell you what to do."

Eugene obeyed without asking questions. He sewed and polished the boots and gave them to the cat to try on. They looked like new.

The cat put them on. They looked very handsome on him. "I'll be going now. I should be back tomorrow," the cat said and headed down the road.

A mile or so from the mill, the road passed through a large meadow. The cat looked around until he saw a narrow trail through the grass. He walked along it a short way, then lay down on his back, closed his eyes and didn't move a muscle.

Soon, a small, plump rabbit came hopping along. It froze when it saw the cat in front of it. When the cat's body didn't move, the rabbit hopped up to it and began to sniff.

Suddenly, the cat grabbed the rabbit by the throat and choked it. "Now you're ready to meet the king," he remarked. He carefully cleaned a spot of blood off one of his paws, threw the rabbit over his shoulders and headed toward the king's palace.

The guards at the palace gate were surprised when they saw a cat wearing handsome boots and carrying a rabbit over his shoulder. When the cat spoke to them and said that he had a gift for the king from his master, the Marquis de Carabas, they were amazed—so amazed that they let him in.

The cat walked up to the throne, bowed low and placed the rabbit in front of the king. “Your Majesty, this plump, fresh rabbit is a gift from my master, the Marquis de Carabas.”

The king thanked the cat. He had never heard of the Marquis de Carabas, but it would never do to let any of his subjects find out that he didn’t know everything. The cat bowed and left the palace.

Although Eugene was bursting with questions when the cat arrived home the next morning, he knew well enough to keep quiet. But when the cat asked him to make him a large leather bag with drawstrings to close it at the top, he couldn’t help himself. “A leather bag? Why?”

“Don’t ask questions, and do what I tell you,” the cat responded. So Eugene did.

When the bag was finished, the cat slung it over his shoulder, headed down the road and, once again, turned into the meadow. This time, he placed the bag in the middle of the trail, propped it open with a stick and put a handful of corn kernels inside. Then he tied a long string to the drawstrings and hid in the bush.

Soon, two pheasants came down the trail and, seeing the corn, walked into the bag. The cat pulled the string that closed the bag, threw the bag over his shoulder, returned to the road and walked to the palace. This time the guards didn’t question him, but ushered him right into the throne room. The king was impressed with the fine game birds that, according to the cat, the Marquis de Carabas had sent, and he expressed his desire to meet him.

The cat explained that his master was extremely busy fixing his castle and overseeing the work of the farms that surrounded it. But he was sure that the young man would be delighted to meet the king when the work was finished.

When the king heard that the cat's master had a fine castle and many farms, he was even more impressed. "I will be travelling through my kingdom in three days. Perhaps I shall pass by the Marquis' lands," he said to the cat.

Three days later, the cat told his master to put on his dirtiest, most ragged clothes, follow him and not ask questions. The two of them walked past the meadow and into a grove of trees through which flowed a large stream.

"Take off these clothes, hang them on that branch, go into the water and start scrubbing yourself. If you hear me yelling, just stay where you are."

In a few minutes, a carriage came along the road, pulled by six magnificent white horses and surrounded by armed men on horseback.

The cat rushed into the middle of the road, waving his arms wildly and crying out, "Help, help! My master, the Marquis de Carabas, has been robbed."

The carriage stopped, and the door opened. Out stepped the king and the princess, the most beautiful young woman in the kingdom.

"It was such a hot day that my master decided to take a swim in the stream," the cat gasped. "While he was in the water, three men snuck up, stole his beautiful clothes, left some old rags and took his horse. I tried to stop them. But what could I do? I'm too small to fight three big robbers."

"Your master has been so kind to me," the king told the cat, "that I would be only too happy to help him." He ordered his servants to bring a large blanket so that the Marquis could dry himself, and to find some clothes that would fit him.

While they were doing this, the cat slipped away and continued down the road.

In a few minutes, Eugene came up to the carriage, as clean and well dressed as he'd ever been in his life. He bowed to the king, who thanked him profusely for the wonderful gifts he'd sent. Eugene looked surprised and was just about to ask a question, when the king asked him one. "My dear Marquis, wherever did you find that wonderful cat? It doesn't just talk, it speaks beautifully. It must have cost you a fortune."

"My father gave it to me," Eugene explained. "It was his most valued possession."

The king was impressed. *What a rich man this Marquis de Carabas must be*, he thought. And he invited the young man to ride in his carriage and to sit beside the beautiful young princess.

Meanwhile, the cat had arrived at a large grain field where peasants were busily cutting a bountiful harvest. "The king is coming," he told the workers. "You must tell him that these fields belong to the Marquis de Carabas. If you do not, you will be cut into tiny pieces." Terrified, they agreed.

He passed several more fields, saying the same thing to the workers. Finally, he arrived at the gates of a very large castle. "Who lives here?" he asked the guards.

They told him that this was the home of a fearful ogre who had a terrible temper and magical powers. "He can change himself into many different creatures," one of them said.

"Tell your master that I am an ambassador from the Marquis de Carabas and that I have come to pay my master's respects."

Impressed by the cat's fancy boots and noble way of speaking, the guards ushered him into the castle.

When he saw how huge the ogre was, and what big, sharp teeth he had, the cat was afraid for the first time in his life. He wanted to run, but instead he bowed to his host. “I am honored to be here. My master, the Marquis de Carabas, asked me to arrange a meeting with you. He has heard of your great powers. He told me that you could transform yourself into large, fierce animals. It is almost beyond belief.”

Now, the ogre wasn’t used to being treated with such dignity and respect. Usually people just trembled, wept and begged him not to eat them. “I certainly can,” he said, a note of pride in his voice. “What would you like to see?”

“Certainly one as noble as you would look wonderful as a lion, the king of the beasts.”

In an instant, a great lion stood where the ogre had been. It roared so loudly that the dishes rattled on the shelves and pictures fell from the wall. The cat became more frightened. But he kept calm, and when the ogre had resumed his usual shape, the cat remarked, “That was magnificent. You were even more amazing that I ever could have imagined.

“But,” he said, “there are things I’ve heard about your magic powers that, even after seeing what you just did, I still can’t believe. People say you can make yourself into the smallest of creatures, that you could even become an insignificant little mouse.”

“It is a difficult thing to do. But I don’t know of anyone else who can change into a small creature as well as I can. Watch.” In an instant, a tiny mouse was standing in front of the cat. But not for long. The cat sprung, and that was the end of the ogre.

Then the cat walked proudly down to the castle gates. “I have killed your master,” he told them. “The king will be arriving here soon

with the Marquis de Carabas, and unless you tell him that this castle belongs to the Marquis, I will kill all of you as well."

Meanwhile, the king stopped his carriage at each field they passed, and when he learned that they all belonged to the Marquis de Carabas, he became more and more impressed with the young man sitting beside his daughter.

The carriage arrived at the ogre's castle gates late in the afternoon. "Welcome, Your Majesty," the guards called out. "And welcome home, Marquis."

Eugene saw his cat sitting on the castle step and realized that it had been at work again. He wasn't sure how, but he could wait until later to ask questions. He invited the king inside. As they walked through the magnificent rooms, looking at the fine tapestries, the gold-plated candle holders and the elegantly carved hardwood furniture, the king became more and more impressed with the young man he had rescued by the stream.

The king smiled as he thought to himself how wonderful it would be for him if he could marry his daughter to this handsome and very wealthy marquis. He moved closer to Eugene and, in what he thought was a whisper but was really quite loud, said, "You are a fine young man, and I would be honoured if you would become my son-in-law. Would you consider marrying my daughter?"

The princess blushed a little when she overheard her father. But she smiled as well.

Eugene was speechless.

"What's the matter? Has the cat got your tongue?" asked the king.

At that moment, the cat brushed against the young man's leg, sprung onto his lap and whispered, "It's okay to speak now. In fact, you'd better speak. Say *yes*."

“Yes, Your Majesty, I would be honoured to have you as my father-in-law.” Eugene looked at the princess, who was still smiling.

Eugene and the princess were soon married. They were very happy. The king was even happier, for he had acquired a very rich son-in-law.

And the cat was happy, too. He dined on caviar and imported fish, drank the richest dairy cream and only hunted mice when he felt a little bored.

Why ROBIN HOOD Became a Butcher

ENGLAND :: **For over 600 years, people have been retelling stories about Robin Hood, the English hero who fought against the cruel and evil Sheriff of Nottingham. Although Robin Hood was an excellent archer, he often used his wits to defeat his enemies and help poor people.**

Robin Hood was bored. It had been raining for several days. Now the sun had started shining, and he wanted to get away from his campsite deep in Sherwood Forest.

"I think I'll see if I can find a deer. Our meat supply is getting low," he said to Little John.

Little John knew that Robin probably wasn't going into the forest to hunt. His friend loved adventures, especially when they were dangerous. Robin had often talked about going to Nottingham to bring the Sheriff to Sherwood Forest to punish him for the evil deeds he'd done against so many honest and poor people.

"Don't go near the King's Highway," Little John warned his friend. "The Sheriff of Nottingham has increased his patrols. He's sworn that he is going to catch you. And whatever you do, don't go near Nottingham Town."

"I'm not that foolish," Robin laughed as he walked from the campsite into the forest.

But as he walked along, Robin thought that going into Nottingham Town would be quite an adventure—something exciting after being confined to the forest for so long. But how to do it?

He was so busy thinking about going into the town that before he realized it, he was at the edge of the King's Highway. He sat on a large boulder beside the road. He was still thinking about getting into town when a man leading a horse with a two-wheeled cart came down the highway.

Robin called out a greeting, and the man stopped, an alarmed look on his face. A man carrying a bow and arrow could be dangerous. He gripped his staff. If this was a robber, he'd give him a good fight.

"Who are you?" asked Robin.

"I'm a butcher," came the reply. "I'm on the way to Nottingham to sell my beef."

When he heard this, Robin had an idea. "I have a proposition to make. If you sold me your horse, the cart and the beef that's in it, you could make a lot of money without having to work for it. I'd give you a good price, especially if you gave me your leather jerkin, your apron and that slouch hat you're wearing."

The butcher laughed. "I'd be some kind of fool to do that."

"If I offered you 20 pounds, that would certainly pay for the meat and the horse and cart, with a lot left over. You could easily buy a better horse and cart."

The butcher agreed. Robin wore the hat pulled over his eyes and the greasy apron and jerkin over his woodsman clothes. Then he led the horse into the market square in Nottingham.

He sang lustily as he set up his cart in the market. He talked loudly to the other butchers and then surprised everyone when he called out to people around, "Fine meats, I have fine meats for sale. A penny a pound for quality beef. And if you're young and pretty and will give me a hug and kiss, you can have a pound of meat for free."

The other butchers shook their heads. "This fellow must be weak in the head, selling meat so cheaply. Why, we barely make enough money when we charge three pennies for a pound."

Word spread through the market about this strange new butcher, and a line of women, many of them young and very pretty, formed in

front of Robin's cart. Soon the meat was all gone. Robin jingled the coins in his purse, smiled and whistled happily.

"And now," he called out in a very loud voice, "I will sell this fine cart and this handsome horse. I don't want to be a butcher anymore. If anyone will offer me five pounds, the horse and cart are his."

Both the horse and cart were better than those of the other butchers, so Robin made a quick sale. The people around snickered and nodded knowingly at each other. Obviously, the butcher was a fool, and a rich one. He couldn't have owned such a fine animal or cart, nor could he have brought such good meat to market, if he hadn't had money.

The news of this loud, foolish and possibly wealthy butcher soon reached the Sheriff of Nottingham, whose very grand house stood not far from the market. *I'll have to meet this strange fellow*, the Sheriff thought to himself. *It seems that he can be separated from his money very easily*.

Soon, one of the sheriff's servants came to the market and announced that all the butchers had been invited to lunch at his master's home. They looked surprised. Although the Sheriff thought nothing of raising the taxes of the townspeople, and although he lived well himself, he seldom invited people to his home. And on the few times that he did, there wasn't much food and drink.

"Welcome, everyone," the Sheriff said as the butchers entered his house. "And where is this butcher everyone is talking about, the one who sells his meat so reasonably?" When they pointed to Robin, the Sheriff walked up to him, embraced him and announced that he was to be the guest of honour and sit at the host's right side.

Although the food wasn't good and there wasn't much of it, and the wine was watered down, Robin loudly thanked his host for his

generosity. “I would like to show my appreciation by buying some of your best wine to share with my fellow butchers.” He opened his purse and slapped on the table the coins he’d earned from the sale of the meat, horse and cart. Then, much to everyone’s surprise, he added two more pounds.

The Sheriff ordered his servant to bring out some of his better wine—just enough for everyone to have another drink. When the glasses were filled, Robin stood up, and in a booming voice, he announced a toast to such a fine host.

“I have heard that you have decided to give up being a butcher,” the Sheriff said quietly when Robin sat down. “Do you have any cattle you would consider selling to me? I’d certainly offer you a good price.”

“Why, I have more than 300 horned beasts—all of them fat and healthy. They are worth at least 1,000 pounds for the lot,” Robin replied. “But because you have been so kind to me, I would be happy to sell them for 500.”

The Sheriff knew that that many horned beasts in good condition were worth much more than 1,000 pounds. But he explained to Robin Hood that he was currently short of money and that the most he could offer would be 300 pounds.

“That is a good offer, and I accept it, my friend,” said Robin loudly. He slapped the Sheriff heavily on the back. The other butchers shook their heads.

Being the deceitful man that he was, the Sheriff didn’t trust anyone else. *Perhaps*, he thought to himself, *these cattle aren’t as good as the foolish butcher says they are. Perhaps the fool may decide to call off the deal*. So he decided that he’d better collect the cattle quickly.

The Sheriff pushed back his chair, stood up and announced to his lunch guests that the feast was over and they could leave, all except the young butcher who'd agreed to sell his cattle. He said to the foolish butcher, "I'm sure you are anxious to get these animals off your hands and receive your payment. We could leave now with a few of my men so that I can collect the cattle and be home before sunset."

Robin agreed, and soon the small group set out. The Sheriff and his men rode horses, and Robin trotted on foot beside them. It was not long before they reached the spot where Robin had bought the horse and cart.

"We will follow this trail," Robin explained. He pointed to a path that led off the King's Highway. "Soon you will see many of my horned beasts." The group headed deep into the forest.

The Sheriff began to look a little worried. "Are you sure this is the right way? These are the woods that hide Robin Hood. Aren't we in danger?" he asked.

"Not at all," came the reply. "Why, I assure you that Robin Hood would no more harm you than I would. He is a man who loves all honest people. But watch carefully, Sir Sheriff, you may see a few of the horned beasts wandering among the trees. Look, there is one, just beyond the big oak tree."

When the Sheriff looked and saw a magnificent buck, he began to be more than a little worried. He glanced behind him, hoping to catch a glimpse of the highway, but he could see nothing other than the trail winding through the trees.

"Perhaps I won't buy your horned beasts, young butcher. I really should return to the King's Highway and head back to Nottingham Town before darkness falls," he told Robin, in a voice that trembled slightly.

“But, my dear Sheriff,” Robin replied genially, “before you return to town, I must repay your hospitality. We shall enjoy good meat and drink.”

The Sheriff’s face turned white. He was about to order his men to turn back when he noticed men with longbows standing in the shadows. He suspected now that this foolish butcher might be Robin Hood and that he and his men might be in considerable trouble. “I do not like this place,” he said aloud, in a voice that sounded very worried.

Robin pretended not to notice the Sheriff’s nervousness. “Good sir, spur your horse and tell your men to hurry, for I smell good food a-cooking. We shall have a feast.” He took the reins of the Sheriff’s horse and led it forward. Soon they entered a large clearing.

“I’m home,” he called out. “And I’ve brought a special guest with me.”

Dismay spread across the Sheriff’s face. He could see no horned beasts. But he could see many men, big strong men, and all of them carried bows and arrows or quarterstaffs.

“Let me be gone, Robin Hood, you rogue,” he ordered angrily.

“You may go soon. But it would be poor hospitality if I didn’t offer you and your men a hearty meal.”

The Sheriff could do nothing but agree to stay. He knew that if he tried to break away, he would be captured. And so, when Robin sat at a rough table set beneath a spreading oak and invited his guest to take the place of honour at his right side, he did so.

It was a wonderful meal, roast venison seasoned with wild herbs, all washed down with flagons of nut brown ale. The Sheriff recognized that this was a much better meal than the one he’d served to the butchers only a few hours ago.

He began to relax. Robin didn't seem to have any ill will toward him. He'd return home safely. Of course, he wouldn't have any cattle. But he'd still have the bag of coins that he'd hidden under his coat.

"The sun is getting low," he said to Robin. "I thank you for your hospitality, but we must leave now. We won't be able to find our way to the highway in the dark."

"But stay, good sir; enjoy one more flagon of our delicious ale to warm you as you travel home. Do not worry about the darkness, for my men know the way to the King's Highway as well at night as in broad daylight."

Reluctantly, the Sheriff accepted another flagon of ale. It was dark when he stood up and announced that he and his men really must go.

"Of course," Robin replied genially. "But before you go, there is the small matter of payment for the meal you and your men have enjoyed. Here, we feed poor people and charge nothing; but the rich must pay and pay well. That is how we are able to help the poor."

He turned to Little John, who stood nearby, and said, "Certainly our guest would not object to paying 300 pounds for such a fine feast. I'm sure he brought that much money with him to pay for the horned beasts."

"But," stammered the Sheriff, "I do not have 300 pounds with me. I had intended to give you 100 pounds for your horned beasts now and send the rest to you when I got them safely home. Besides, they aren't cattle, they're wild deer—and all the wild deer in the forest belong to the king. They aren't yours to sell."

"But they are horned beasts, my friend. That's what I said they were. And I think you have 300 pounds to pay for the fine meal." Robin Hood turned again to Little John and said, "Little John, doesn't

that look like a rather large bulge under the Sheriff's coat? I doubt that it was made by all the food he ate."

Little John found the bag of money. He handed it to Robin, who opened it and spilled the coins on the table. "We must make sure we take only 300 pounds. We would not want to overcharge our guest." But when they had counted the money, they found that there were only 295 pounds.

"Doubtless the Sheriff was in so great a haste to buy our horned beasts that he didn't count correctly. But let us be generous and accept what he has offered us for the meal."

Then, when the horses had been brought to the Sheriff and his men, Robin and six of his men led their guests out of the clearing and along a winding trail. By the time they reached the King's Highway, the Sheriff was thoroughly confused and frightened. "Where are we? Where are you taking me?" he asked.

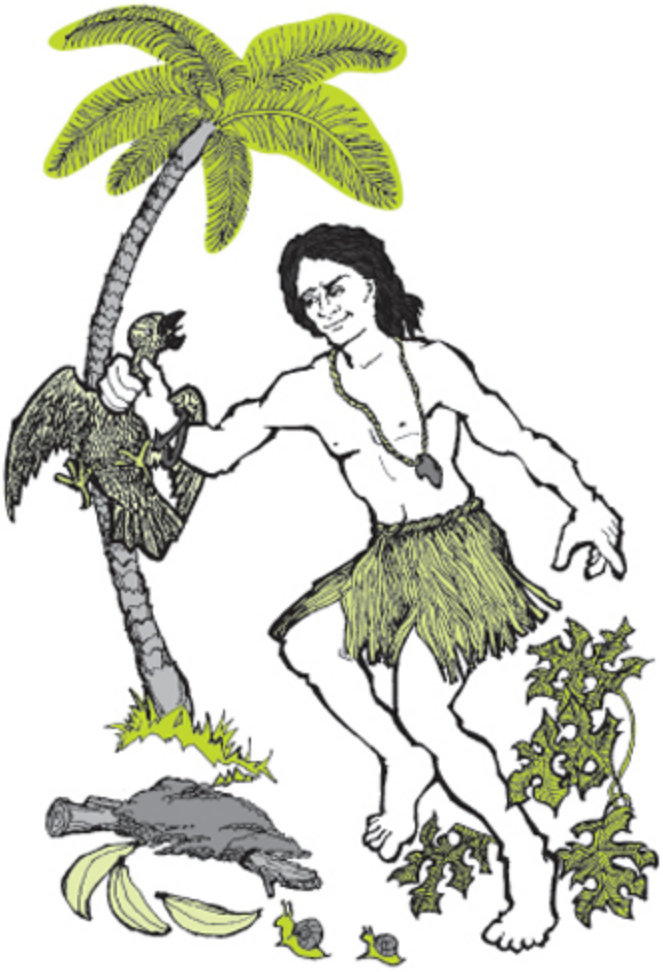
A full moon was shining, and Robin Hood pointed the Sheriff's horse in the direction of town. "You should be able to find your way home from here easily. May you have a safe journey," Robin said.

"And," he called, as the horses disappeared into the distance, "do come to visit us again. You'll always be welcome."

Robin Hood whistled happily as he and his men walked back to the campsite deep in Sherwood Forest.

He wasn't bored anymore.

How MAUI Discovered the Secret of Fire



HAWAII :: From New Zealand to Hawaii, the Polynesian people told stories about the legendary hero Maui. Half-god and half-human, he played tricks on friends and enemies, sometimes for selfish reasons and sometimes to help others.

Maui's mother and his three older brothers were very angry at him. He had let the cooking fire die out. Years ago, people could get more fire from the volcano when the cooking fire went out. But now the volcano was extinct. That's why the job of taking care of the fire, feeding it wood and sheltering it from rain showers with taro leaves, was so important.

The day it was Maui's turn to take care of the fire, he had been so busy daydreaming and planning tricks to annoy his brothers that he hadn't noticed the rain clouds overhead. When the first drops hit him, he rushed to find some leaves to cover the fire. But it was too late. The rain had put the fire out and turned the ashes to mud.

Now everyone would have to eat their fish raw, and they wouldn't enjoy delicious baked bananas. "At least you can do something useful," Maui's older brother grumbled one morning as he shook Maui awake. "Help us paddle the canoe. Even if we have to eat them raw, we still have to catch fish."

The four brothers paddled out from the island just as the sun cast its first light on the hills that rose behind the family's home. Maui stopped paddling and gazed at the land. "Get to work," his brothers growled. But he kept gazing.

"Look!" he cried out. "Up in the hills! There's smoke coming out from the trees. Take me ashore, and I'll see if I can find some fire."

"Not just yet, you lazy fellow. You just want to get out of work. It's probably the morning mist. If there's still some smoke when we've finished our job, then we'll let you look for fire."

Late in the afternoon, as they headed home, their boat filled with fish, Maui cried out again: “The smoke is still there! Please, let me ashore!”

The oldest brother told the others to paddle to the beach. He didn’t think much would come of Maui’s search, but now that the job of fishing was done, it was worth a try.

Maui raced across the sand and up the steep hillside. He could smell the smoke, and soon he heard some clucking noises. As he rushed excitedly through the trees, he could smell the delicious aroma of baking bananas.

A flock of alae hens were cooking bananas. They heard Maui crashing through the bushes. “Quickly, sisters,” one of them cried out, “put out the fire. Someone is coming to steal the fire that the gods gave to us.”

The hens scratched sand over the coals and flew off.

Maui grabbed a stick and started raking through the sand, looking for live coals. But the fire was completely dead.

Maui arrived home at sunset. As he and his brothers ate the raw fish and cold bananas that his mother had prepared, he told them what had happened on the hillside.

“You were right,” his oldest brother said after Maui had finished telling his story. “The next time we go fishing, we’ll leave you behind to look for fire. Perhaps, if you’re more patient, you can sneak up and get some. It certainly would be nice to have some broiled fish and baked bananas and to be able to see what we’re eating.”

Early the next morning, only three brothers paddled their canoe to the fishing grounds. Maui stayed onshore. He crept very quietly to the edge of the clearing where he had seen the alae hens the day before. There were no hens around, so he sat and waited for them

to arrive. None did, and as the sun sunk lower in the west, he returned home.

The brothers tried their plan for the next two days. Both times, no alae hens came to the clearing. On the second night, Maui was unusually quiet.

“What’s the matter, little brother?”

“I’ve been thinking. Perhaps the hens are watching our canoe every morning, and when they see that there are only three people in it, they don’t light their fire. They know that I’ve stayed back to steal it.”

The brothers agreed. They decided that all four of them would go fishing the next day. Sure enough, as soon as they had paddled away from the island, a thin column of smoke rose from the hillside.

Again, at dinner, Maui sat quietly thinking. Finally, he told his brothers that he had a plan. “Tomorrow, before the sun comes up, let’s put a large calabash covered with tapa cloth where I usually sit in the canoe. That way the hens will think I’m with you, and maybe they’ll start their fire.”

The next morning, by the time the canoe was halfway to the fishing grounds, smoke rose from the hillside. This time, Maui crept even more quietly toward the clearing. Soon he heard the cackling of the hens. Then he smelled baking bananas. He moved closer. He saw the fire and five birds watching the cooking fruit. A sixth bird stood close to the edge of the clearing, its beady eyes surveying the taro bushes.

A gust of wind blew aside the leaves that Maui was hiding behind, and the watching alae called out a warning. “Put out the fire, he’s here!”

In an instant, the fire was covered with sand. The alae’s warning had worked. But the bird was so close that Maui was able to lunge

out from the bush and grab her by the neck.

The hen squawked shrilly and flapped her wings in a frenzy. But Maui held tight. “You have fire, but you won’t share it with others,” Maui told her. “How can we cook?” he asked. “How can we see properly when the night comes? You must tell me where you hide it and give some to us.”

“That is our secret. The gods gave the fire to us, and we won’t share it. You will never find it.”

Maui started to squeeze the alae’s neck. “If you kill me,” she sputtered, “you’ll never find the fire. Let go of me, and I’ll tell you how to find it.”

Maui knew that if he let the bird go, she would fly away and he’d never discover the secret of fire. So he tied her up. Then he threatened the alae. “Tell me, or I’ll grab you by the neck again.”

“It’s hidden in the taro leaves,” said the alae. “Take two of them and rub them together until they start to burn.”

Maui took two of the leaves, placed them together and began to rub vigorously. Nothing happened. He rubbed harder. Then the leaves began to turn soft in his hands. Finally, they became a green mush.

“You tricked me,” Maui snapped at the hen. He grabbed her by the neck and began to choke her again.

“Stop, I’ll tell you,” gasped the alae. “If you choke me to death, you’ll never learn the secret.” Maui let go. “Take two dry sticks from that bush over and rub them together. That’s really where I hid the fire.”

And so Maui cut two sticks and began rubbing one against the other. Nothing happened.

“This is your last chance,” he yelled as he grabbed the alae by the neck once again. “If you don’t tell the truth, you will die.”

“Cut a stick of sandalwood and pick up that piece of hau wood that’s lying beside the fire. That’s where the fire is hidden. Make a point at the end of the sandalwood stick and put it into the groove of the hau. Then start spinning the stick back and forth between your hands as fast as you can. And don’t stop.”

Maui sat down, held the hau wood between his feet and put the stick in the groove. The first few times he tried to spin it, the stick slipped out of the groove. But gradually, he discovered how to keep it in place while it was spinning.

Sweat began to form on Maui’s forehead as he pressed the stick down and spun it between his hands. Blisters formed on the palms of his hands. The only thing that happened to the hau wood was that a small pile of tiny shavings had formed around the point of the sandalwood stick.

He became angrier and angrier. The hen had tricked him again. *I’m going to put my fingers around her throat and give her neck a real spin*, he thought. *That would teach her a lesson.* He was just about to throw the stick down when he noticed a tiny wisp of gray smoke coming from the pile of shavings.

The blisters on his hands stung, but he spun the stick backward and forward as fast as he could. More and more smoke rose from the pile of shavings. Suddenly, a little flame burst out. Maui dropped the pointed stick and clapped his hands with excitement. He’d discovered where the alae had hidden the fire.

The flame burned the little pile of shavings and flickered out. Maui wasn’t worried; he knew that he could get fire whenever he needed it. He would need only a pointed sandalwood stick and a piece of hau wood.

But he was still angry at the alae. He grabbed her by the throat with one hand and held her up. “I’m not going to kill you. But you

deserve to be punished for refusing to share the secret of fire with people when they needed it. I had to rub that hau wood very hard with the stick to make fire. Now I'm going to rub your head."

Maui rubbed the alae's head until all the feathers came off and the front of her head was as red as fire. "Now when people see you or your descendents, they'll see the red head and remember that you wouldn't share fire," Maui told her.

And to this day, all the alae hens in Hawaii have red foreheads.

Maui happily returned home, carrying the sandalwood stick and piece of hau. When the brothers came back from their fishing trip, they could smell roasting bananas as they walked up the path to their home. Maui told them about the secret of fire as they cooked fish for their dinner.

Sometimes Maui still forgets to pay attention to the fire, especially when he's daydreaming about tricks he can play on his older brothers. But now, when the fire goes out, they don't get angry at him. Instead, they make him cut pieces of sandalwood and hau and do the hard work of getting a new fire started.

How RAVEN Freed the Sun

CANADA and UNITED STATES :: The Native peoples along the coast of northern British Columbia and southeast Alaska told stories about Raven, who used his cleverness to perform both selfish and unselfish deeds. Although he often annoyed others, they appreciated how, one time, he used his wits to help them escape from cold, dampness and never-ending darkness.

Raven cawed angrily. It was always dark and cold and damp—there was never any sunlight. A powerful old man who lived in the mountains far to the east kept it hidden in a wooden box inside his lodge.

Every once in a long while, somebody would try to find the old man's lodge. Most of the searchers got lost and barely managed to get home. Some never returned at all.

"This is enough," Raven squawked to himself. "It's so foggy and dark that I can't see the spruce trees. I keep running into the sharp needles. My feathers are all damp. I can't see where the people have left fish heads and guts for me. And whenever I go to a stream for a drink, I can't even see whether I'm handsome or not—although I'm sure I am. I'm going to try to find the lodge of the old man. I'm going to free the sun so that everyone can be warm and dry. Then I will be able to see how handsome I really am."

Raven launched himself into the air. He flew above the trees and headed through the darkness toward the mountains in the east. After he had been flying for a long time, the clouds broke up, and he could see the stars. And in the dim light, he saw a lodge in the distance.

He flew toward it, landed on the roof and peered cautiously through the smoke hole. In the flames cast by the fire, he could see an old man and a young woman. And, in the corner, he could see

several ornately carved storage boxes. Raven saw light coming from a crack in one of the boxes.

It would be very difficult to get into the lodge and get the box. The old man and the young woman would instantly be on the alert as soon as they saw a bird flying through the smoke hole. Even if he got to the box, he wouldn't be able to open it. And it was too big to grab in his beak.

What was he to do? He could forget about his quest and fly away. But that would be admitting defeat, and Raven was too proud to do that. Besides, he'd still be cold and damp. And in the dark he would never be able to see how handsome he was.

He was perched silently on the roof thinking about how to get into the lodge when he heard the young woman speak to the old man.

"I am thirsty, Father. I'm going to the stream for a drink. I'll take the cedar basket with me and bring back water for spruce tea," she told him. "It will be good for you. You haven't seemed quite yourself lately."

Now Raven knew what to do.

He glided from the roof to the branch of a spruce tree beside the stream and waited for the young woman to arrive. Just as she was about to dip her basket into the stream, he changed himself into a spruce needle and dropped into the water. He floated into the basket, and when the girl lifted it to her lips, she swallowed the needle. Raven was inside her stomach when she returned to the lodge.

He'd solved his first problem. He was inside the lodge, and no one knew he was there. But he had another problem. He was a spruce needle inside the girl's stomach. He was not what he needed to be, or where he needed to be, if he were to get the sun from the large wooden box in the corner.

He turned himself into an unborn baby. Several moons later, he came back into the lodge as a human baby boy. He was an unusual-looking child. While it wasn't unusual that his hair was shiny black, his beady black eyes looked more like the eyes of a raven than those of a baby boy. His nose was sharp and pointed. And when he cried, it sounded more like he was squawking or cawing.

The old man and his daughter were overjoyed to have a baby boy in their home. The grandfather thought that the child was wonderful. He spent most of his time playing with him and making little wooden toys. He didn't even mind when the child made his terrible crying noise. In fact, whenever the boy cried, the old man worked very hard to make him happy.

Raven was enjoying himself. He liked being the centre of attention. He was well fed, and he was warm. When the old man remarked that he was the most handsome baby that had ever been born, he felt proud. If he were that good-looking as a human being, think of what he would be like as a raven.

But Raven never forgot why he was there. He knew he had to take his time until he could find a way to get the sun from its box and escape.

Raven began to crawl much sooner than ordinary babies. His grandfather was delighted and would crawl beside him on the cedar planks. It hurt the old man's knees, but it made the little boy smile and giggle.

"I've never seen so strong a baby," the grandfather proudly told visitors. "Other children can't even sit up at this age. I know he's the handsomest baby. Just look at his eyes. They certainly are dark, but they sparkle."

It wasn't long before the little boy was able to pull himself up when he crawled to the storage boxes in the corner. He'd point at

one of the boxes and squawk until the grandfather would open it and hand him something.

Each day, Raven would point at a storage box that was closer to the one that contained the sun. Finally, he pointed at that box and squawked. He was certain that the old man would lift it down, and that once it was opened, he could grab the sun and make his escape.

It wasn't so easy. The old man looked sad, but he sternly told the child: "No. This box is very special to your grandfather. Maybe when you are much older, I will let you look inside."

Raven had been very patient. He had pretended to be a little human baby for a long time. Although he had also enjoyed all the warmth and attention, now that the object of his quest was nearly in his reach, he wanted it right away.

He began to cry raucously, *Caw, waa, caw, caw, waa*.

The old man still said, "No."

Raven kept crying and pointing. He stopped eating. He wouldn't sleep. His mother began to worry. "Father, if he keeps this up, he'll get sick. I'm afraid he'll die."

Gradually, the boy's black hair began to lose its lustre. The bright spark began to fade from his black eyes, and he stopped crawling toward the box in the corner. The only thing that didn't change was his squawking cry. It was as strong as ever. The two adults became more and more worried.

Finally, the little boy stopped pointing at the box, and his crying became a hoarse whisper.

"I think he's dying," the old man said in alarm. "I don't know how I could live without him. I used to think that what was inside that box was my greatest treasure. But now I know he is. If I'm going to lose him, I can at least let him look inside the box before he goes."

The young woman and the old man walked over to the corner of the lodge. They reached up for the box together. Their backs were to Raven, and they didn't see a mischievous twinkle flicker in his black eyes. They concentrated so hard as they carefully lifted the box down that they didn't hear him make a cackling noise that sounded like a little laugh.

They carried the box across the room to where the little boy lay and opened it. A bright golden yellow light shone throughout the room. Raven smiled weakly at the old man and his daughter. He tried to raise his arms.

"He wants to hold the sun," the young woman told her father. "Let's give it to him. I'll help him sit up, Father, and then you can lift the sun into his arms."

As she lifted the little boy, he began to flap his arms like a young bird learning to fly. He started to caw loudly. And then he began to change. Black feathers grew along his arms. His nose turned into a beak. He stood up, all the while flapping his arms rapidly. The woman and the old man gasped as his arms became wings and his head and body turned into those of a raven.

"Thank you for the gift of the sun, Grandfather," said Raven. "Now I will be able find my food much more easily. I won't keep running into spruce branches. And now I'll be able to see how handsome I really am," he said in a raspy voice.

He seized the sun with his beak, flapped his wings harder and flew through the smoke hole of the lodge.

Raven flew higher and higher to get far away from the old man and his daughter. As he climbed into the sky, he discovered not only that the sun was very bright, but also that it was very hot. In fact, the sun was too hot to hold in his beak. He gave a mighty flick of his head, opened his beak and sent the sun spinning upward. Gradually

it stopped climbing into the sky and began to move toward the western sea.

Raven was worried; as fast as he could fly, the sun moved faster. *If it sinks into the sea*, he thought to himself, *it will be dark again. All my cleverness and hard work will have been wasted*.

The sun did sink into the sea. Once again the world was dark and cold and damp. Raven flew down to the branches of a spruce tree. He went to sleep feeling very tired and very sad. Much later, when he awoke, pink light shone above the mountains to the east, and soon the sun rose and brought colour and warmth to the world.

Raven didn't understand what had happened. But when the sun again travelled across the sky, sank into the sea and then rose over the eastern mountains, he realized that the sphere he had stolen from the old man's lodge would only shine over the mountains, forests, rivers and seas for half of the time.

At first, when the people saw the sun travel across the sky, they were frightened. It seemed so hot and bright. Then they were alarmed when it disappeared and darkness returned. Raven told them that, at great danger to himself, he had found the sun for them. But to make them appreciate it and him more fully, he said that they would have to do without it for a while after it had disappeared into the sea.

The people, who sometimes used to think of Raven as a noisy nuisance, thanked him. "What can we do for you?" they asked.

He replied that now that they had more light when they went fishing and could catch more fish, they must make sure they left him plenty of fish heads and fish guts.

It still gets damp and cold sometimes, and, of course, it's dark at night. But when it is bright and warm, Raven is very happy. He loves to eat what the people leave him. He especially enjoys spending

time by any pool he can find, admiring his reflection in the water. Now he can see that he really is handsome.

Glossary

alae hen :: A member of the mud hen family, with a black body and bright red forehead. It is found in Hawaii.

banyan tree :: A very large shade tree, considered sacred because when the Buddha sat under it, he gained enlightenment. It is often used to stand for unity.

bufflehead :: A 33- to 38-centimetre-long duck with a white body, black back and large head.

cadi :: A judge in a Muslim court.

calabash :: A large hardwood bowl in which food is served.

catalpa tree :: A tree that often grows to 15 metres in height. The long branches and large leaves provide a great deal of shade.

chital deer :: A spotted deer with large antlers. It lives in Indian jungles and is often killed by tigers and Asian lions.

collard greens :: A cabbage-like plant that is steam-cooked, often with salted pork.

coolamon :: A vessel carved out of wood, often used by Australian Aboriginals for carrying food and water.

coot :: A 33- to 36-centimetre-long duck-like bird with black feathers, red eyes and large feet.

dingo :: A wild Australian dog that is approximately 1.2 metres long and weighs up to 20 kilograms.

eagle-hawk :: Australia's largest bird of prey, it has a wingspan of close to three metres and a length of nearly 1.5 metres.

effendi :: A gentleman, or master; a term of respect in Turkey.

eucalyptus tree :: One of the most common trees found in Australia. It can grow to more than 80 metres in height.

goral :: A long-tailed, goat-like animal found in India.

gourd :: The hard, dried and hollowed-out shell of a member of the pumpkin family. It is often used to hold water.

griddle cake :: A pancake fried on a flat, heavy metal pan.

hau :: A softwood tree that grows in Hawaii.

hispid hare :: A short-eared, bristly-haired rabbit weighing about 2.5 kilograms, found in northern India.

kite-hawk :: A medium-sized Australian bird of prey that weighs just over one kilogram, has a wingspan of close to 1.5 metres, and very weak legs.

latex :: A kind of sticky tree sap.

longan tree :: A fruit-bearing tree that grows in regions of southwest Asia and Malaysia. The sweet, juicy fruit, sometimes called “cat’s eyes,” hangs from branches that are close to the ground.

mallard :: A 50- to 72-centimetre-long duck. The male has a green head, white neck ring and brownish crest. The female is a mottled brown. It is one of the tamest of wild ducks.

marquis :: In earlier days, a French nobleman who lived near the borders of a kingdom.

merganser :: A 50- to 80-centimetre-long, narrow-bodied, sharp-billed duck. The male has a white body, a black neck and a green-black head. The female is grey and has a crest on the head.

mouse deer :: Called a mouse deer because of its size and appearance, it is 45 centimetres long, stands 20 to 25 centimetres at the shoulder and weighs just over two kilograms.

Norway maple tree :: Grows to a height of over 20 metres. Because its branches can reach lengths of 20 metres, they create a great deal of shade on sunny days.

odum tree :: A tree found in western Africa that was believed to be the gathering place of spirit beings.

ogre :: A man-eating giant.

piastre :: A silver coin used in Turkey.

plantain tree :: A tree that produces a banana-type fruit that is eaten cooked.

pygmy hog :: A small, wild Indian pig, weighing around seven kilograms.

quandong tree :: An Australian tree noted for its ability to stand very dry conditions. The fruit was used by Aboriginal Australians as food and medicine.

sambar :: A large brown deer found in the woodlands of India.

sandalwood :: A hardwood tree that grows in Hawaii. Its wood was often used in the construction of traditional canoe paddles.

sheriff :: In England in the Middle Ages, an official who acted as a judge, tax collector and law-enforcement officer.

spruce :: A sharp-needled evergreen tree. Traditionally, Native peoples used the gum and a tea brewed from the needles as medicine.

string-creeper :: A strong, flexible vine used as rope by many traditional African tribes.

tael :: Until the 20th century, a Chinese coin worth 37 grams of silver.

tapa cloth :: A cloth woven from the soft inner bark of certain trees in the South Pacific Islands.

taro :: A bush with very large leaves. Its roots are used as food.

tenant farmer :: Someone who pays a fee to farm on land owned by another person.

trolls :: Imaginary characters in stories from northern Europe who were very large, ate people and animals, and turned into stone if hit by direct sunlight.

willy wagtail :: A 20-centimetre-long bird named for its habit of moving its tail back and forth horizontally. It will aggressively defend its territory against larger animals and birds.

wombat :: An Australian marsupial that is one metre in length and weighs up to 25 kilograms.

The Trail of the Tales

Each of the stories retold in this collection has a long history extending back to a time when stories were passed on orally from place to place and from generation to generation. With each retelling, storytellers added, deleted or changed the emphasis of details. Many stories from lesser-known cultures became known to larger audiences after they had been collected by anthropologists.

Once stories appeared in print, they continued to change, particularly when they were retold for children. Retellings often reflected the tellers' own beliefs, values and attitudes about what kinds of stories were suitable for children.

I have listed below the various sources I have consulted in retelling these traditional trickster tales from many lands.

"How Anansi Brought Stories to the People"

I have used Captain R.S. Rattray's "How it Came About that the Sky-God's Stories Came to be Known as 'Spider-Stories,'" in his *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930) as the basis of my retelling. I have also consulted Gail E. Haley's award-winning *A Story, a Story* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), an excellent illustrated children's version, and Philip M. Sherlock's "From Tiger to Anansi," *Anansi: the Spider Man (*New York: T.Y. Crowell), a Jamaican version of the story.

"How Brer Rabbit Got Out of Big Trouble"

Although the Brer Rabbit stories are known to many people from the 1946 Walt Disney animated feature *Song of the South*, the stories were first published in the 1880s by Joel Chandler Harris, a white journalist who claimed that, when he was a child, he heard the stories from a former slave. I have drawn my retelling from Harris's version as well as from "The Tar Baby Tricks Brer Rabbit," a 1977 version published by African-American writer William Faulkner in his collection *The Days When the Animals Talked* (Chicago: Follett, 1977) and "The Tar Baby," in Richard M. Dorson's *American Negro Folktales* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1967).

"How Nanabozho Lost His Big Feast"

Versions of this story are found in Native cultures from the western Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains. One of the early English versions of the Ojibway (Chippewa) tales of Nanabozho was Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches,* which was published in 1839 and influenced the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow when he wrote "The Song of Hiawatha." I have drawn from Schoolcraft's brief summary of the tale and Emerson Coatsworth's "Nanabush and the Ducks" in *The Adventures of Nanabush* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1979), as well as incidents from similar stories (such as the trickster being out-tricked by another trickster) from other cultures.

"How Kancil Built a Crocodile Bridge"

I first learned about Mouse Deer a few years after Adele De Leeuw's *Indonesian Legends and Folk Tales* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1961) was published. For my retelling of this story, I reread De Leeuw's book along with A. Hillman and Walter W. Skeat's *Salam the Mouse-Deer* (London: Macmillan, 1938), Harold Courlander's *Kantchil's Lime Pit and Other Stories from Indonesia* (New York:

Harcourt, Brace, 1950), Aaron Shepard's online collection "The Adventures of Mouse Deer" (www.aaronshep.com/stories/R01.html) and Chok Yoon Foo's online version, "Outwitting a Crocodile" (www.topics-mag.com/folk-tales/folk-tale-cleverness-malaysia.htm).

"How the Billy Goats Gruff Got Across the Bridge"

Like most retellings, this one is based on *Popular Tales from the Norse*, Sir George Webbe Dasent's 1859 translation of *Norske Folkeeventyr*, a collection of folktales gathered by Peter Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moe.

"Why the Shining One Shines No More"

This story is part of a centuries-old collection of Indian tales, "The Panchatantra." In my retelling, I have consulted the following online versions: Subhamoy Das's "The Lion and the Hare" (hinduism.about.com/od/panchatantra/a/lionandhare.htm), "The Foolish Lion and the Clever Rabbit" (www.culturalindia.net/indian-folktales/panchatantra-tales/foolish-lion-clever-rabbit.html and http://indianmythology.com/finish/seestory.php?storyID=55) and "The Big Lion and the Little Rabbit" (www.indiaparenting.com/stories/panchatantra/panch002.shmtl).

"How the Tortoise Defeated the willy Wagtail"

This retelling is based on "How the Tortoise Got His Shell," from W. Ramsay Smith's *Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals* (London: George G. Harrap, 1930).

"How Gretel Made Things Get Better"

I have followed the Grimm Brothers' revised version (1814) of "Hansel and Gretel," in which they change the children's mother into their stepmother.

"How Fin Defeated Cucullin"

I have based this retelling on Andrew Lang's version in his 1892 collection, *Celtic Fairy Tales*.

"How the Hodja Used His Wisdom"

There are hundreds of stories about the Hodja, ranging from very short anecdotes to longer tales. In developing his character and the incidents in which he was involved, I consulted Charles Downing's *Tales of the Hodja* (New York: Henry Z. Walck, 1965), particularly "The Hodja and the Thousand Pieces of Gold," Henry D. Barnham's *Tales of Nasr-ed-din Khoja* (London: Nisbet, 1923) and D. Ashliman's *Nasreddin Hodja: Tales of the Turkish Trickster* (www.pitt.edu/~dash/hodja.html).

"How Zhao Paid His Taxes"

While searching for a Chinese folktale that embodied the popular theme of a powerful, greedy and sometimes deceitful merchant, magistrate or landowner getting tricked and embarrassed, I came across a volume entitled *Favourite Folktales of China* (Beijing: New World Press, 1983), translated by John Minford, an American teacher who collected the stories from his students. "The Gold Coat and the Fire Dragon Shirt" was the source for my considerably adapted retelling.

"How Eugene Escaped Poverty"

My retelling is based on Charles Perrault's "The Master Cat or Puss in Boots," first published in 1697.

"Why Robin Hood Became a Butcher"

The Robin Hood stories were first published as ballads. I have drawn on those found in *English and Scottish Popular Ballads,* collected in

the early 19th century by Francis Child. (My edition is the “Students Cambridge Edition” published by Houghton Mifflin in 1904.) I have also been influenced by Howard Pyle’s masterful telling of the story in his *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood,* first published in 1883.

“How Maui Discovered the Secret of Fire”

I have drawn on Roland B. Dixon’s *Oceanic Mythology*, 1916 (www.sacred-texts.com/pac/om/om07.htm), W.D. Westerfelt’s *Legends of Maui,* 1910 (www.sacred-texts.com/pac/maui/maui08.htm) and Thomas G. Thrum’s *Hawaiian Folktales,* 1907 (www.sacred-texts.com/pac/hft/hft05.htm).

“How Raven Freed the Sun”

I have consulted Peter Goodchild’s *Raven Tales: Traditional Stories of Native Peoples* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1991) and “The Theft of Light” in Stith Thompson’s *Tales of the North American Indians* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1929).

Jon C. Stott, a retired English professor, taught children's literature at the University of Alberta for 35 years. He has been telling stories in elementary schools since his children were in grade one. Now he tells stories to granddaughters Sophie and Gillian.

Copyright © 2010 Jon C. Stott

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, audio recording or otherwise—without the written permission of the publisher or a photocopying licence from Access Copyright, Toronto, Canada.

Originally published by Heritage House Publishing in 2010 in paperback with ISBN 978-1-926613-69-7.

This electronic edition was released in 2011.
e-pub ISBN 978-1-926936-67-3

Cataloguing data available from Library and Archives Canada

Edited by Audrey McClellan
Proofread by Karla Decker
Cover design by Jacqui Thomas
Illustrations by Theo Dombrowski

Heritage House acknowledges the financial support for its publishing program from the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CBF), Canada Council for the Arts and the province of British Columbia through the British Columbia Arts Council and the Book Publishing Tax Credit.

Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des Arts du Canada

BRITISH COLUMBIA ARTS COUNCIL

www.heritagehouse.ca